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The THEATRE IN LIFE

BY

NICOLAS EVREINOFF

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With an Introduction by

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INTRODUCTION

America, apparently, is not going to be satisfied until it has commandeered the entire range of Russia's contemporary artistic, dramatic and musical talents. The same season that added Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko and his Moscow Art Theatre Musical Studio to an already full roster also brought Nikolai Yevreynoff, or, as he prefers to be spelled, Nicolas Evreinoff. Evreinoff's play, " The Chief Thing," helped to distinguished the Theatre Guild's first complete season in its new Guild Theatre. " The Chief Thing " has been published, too. But it is only with this book that the fecund and versatile playboy of the eastern world emerges full stature in our presence.

It was my opportunity in " The Russian Theatre " to be the first to acquaint American readers with the personal record and the esthetic theories of Evreinoff, although the Washington Square Players deserve the pioneer's credit for having produced his " Gay Death " under the title of " The Merry Death " as a part of the first bill of their first season at the Comedy Theatre, October 2, 1916. Little did they think that the name of this obscure playwright would ever be more than a name to them, that he would tread the stage of their heirs in person as regisseur. Little did I myself dream that he would ever come to America. Some time after my return, I received a letter from him, written in Sukhum-Kale on the Black Sea, in which he said:

" Only the art of today interests me, and that art is remote from the understanding of the masses. Even Diag-

hileff, although he disclosed to America far from the most modern phases of the art of the ballet, had to cut and change to suit the tastes of conservative audiences."

But the American audience, 1926, like the American theatre, is not the audience of 1916. It has advanced incredibly in comprehension and sympathy. And Evreinoff is here and happy.

In this Introduction to "The Theatre in Life" I am not going to repeat what I wrote in the chapter, "Yevreynoff and Monodrama," in my book, "The Russian Theatre." There the reader will find a detailed biographical sketch, a list of the author's works and copious quotations from his salient theories of the theatre. What I wish to bring out here are two points that will appeal to the American imagination and help readers to visualize the man and his purposes and possibilities as a worker on our stage.

Picture, if you can, a man who in his forty-seven years has been a circus performer, an actor, a playwright and a regisseur; a flutist and a composer; a critic, a novelist and a historian; a painter; a psychologist, a biologist, an archaeologist and a philosopher; a graduate in law, a government official, a teacher and a world traveller. And a tyro at none of these occupations. Russians can do it, and Evreinoff is a Russian of Russians. As regisseur alone, Evreinoff has founded or directed four of the most significant ventures of the modern Russian stage. Whatever he has to say about the theatre and life is the word of an expert.

The second point I wish to make is that this volume is the long-awaited handbook of the modern tendencies in the theatre, the first adequate statement of the psychological foundations of the revolt against dramatic realism.

Heretofore, those who believed in this revolt could point only to their vague beliefs and their instincts in defense of their attitude. Evreinoff provides the scientific background for those beliefs and instincts.

Furthermore, he writes with the authority of the scientist but with the imagination of the artist. This volume is not a compendium of scientific observations for their own sake, although it is built with the care of the scientist. And if the author may seem to some to have drawn unwarranted conclusions from his observations — unwarranted, that is, from the strictly scientific viewpoint — it must be remembered that his quest and his conclusions are justified in his mind if he provides stimulus to new creation in art. That this book will provide such a stimulus, I have no doubt. That it will lead to the publication of Evreinoff's more advanced views, such as the application of his theory of Monodrama, and eventually to the world premiere in America of his most ambitious play, "The Representation of Love," may be a pardonable prediction by one who has seen the Russian theatre in its own home and encouraged it to find a new home overseas.

OLIVER M. SAYLER

NEW YORK CITY,
February, 1927.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Theatre in Life is the first book by Mr. Evreinoff bearing on the subject connoted by this title which appears in English. The present text as it stands is not the translation of some previously published Russian work. Although most of the chapters contained in it have appeared at various times in Russian, the whole may be regarded as a new work specially prepared by Mr. Evreinoff for English and American readers.

In the course of the last fifteen years Mr. Evreinoff wrote several works dealing with various aspects of the theatre in life. The most important of them is *The Theatre for Oneself*, a monograph in three parts which was published at St. Petersburg in 1915–1917. It is from this work that most of the chapters contained in the present volume have been taken. Some of them, however, have undergone considerable changes, or even have been entirely re-written. A number of chapters have been added from *The Theatre as Such* (St. Petersburg, 1912), *Theatrical Novations* (Petrograd, 1922) and *The Theatre in the Animal Kingdom* (Leningrad, 1924).

It goes without saying that *The Theatre in Life* is not a mechanical collection of these chapters. As I have already said, the old material has been re-moulded and reshaped according to a new plan into an entirely new literary entity.

PART I

Theoretical

The Theatre in Life

Chapter I

THE THEATRE, FALSE AND TRUE

WHEN you say "theatre" you are thinking of a building crowded with people who come at a certain hour to occupy certain seats in front of a raised platform called the "stage," on which individuals like yourself impersonate for money other individuals like yourself or different from you, according to the plan of the author, whose work is called a "play." Every half-hour or so a curtain falls in front of the stage, the people applaud or hiss, go to the refreshment room, smoke, meet their acquaintances, converse, drink and flirt, until a prearranged signal calls them back to their purchased seats. Again the curtain rises and everything goes on as before, till the piece is brought to a close and the audience leaves the building.

If you were asked why you went to this "theatre," some of you would reply carelessly and sincerely: "for entertainment." Others would answer with a superior air: "for instruction." Still others would declare with a mine of super-refined blasé-ism: "for aesthetic enjoyment." A fourth group would say nothing, remembering instead the legs of pretty chorus-girls ("Aren't they worth seeing, the cuties?"). Finally, there are some who would state courageously: "Just to boast that we went to the theatre

where we saw a new play in which the leading actor or actress played thus and so, and the author came up on the stage in response to numerous curtain calls, and Mrs. Jones occupied a seat in a box and wore the same dress as the last time. . . ."

Nor do the "intellectuals" among you agree in their understanding of the theatre. Some of them see in it "a platform for the development of an idea by means of action." Others — "a place for the aesthetic fusion of all the arts." Still others — "a means of satisfying our craving for rites and pageantry." A fourth group says approximately the same thing, but with certain additions and modifications.

By the word "theatre" you designate: the place for international encounters when all other arguments fail — *the theatre of military operations;* the place where autopsies are made — *the anatomic theatre;* the prestidigitator's platform — as, for example, *the magic theatre* of Robert Goudin, the first theatre that Sarah Bernhardt knew in her childhood; the place where corporal punishments and tortures may be witnessed — as, for instance, the famous *Theatrum Poenarum* of Dopleur, the criminologist; the Cinematograph; the Kinetophone; the Puppet Show; Shadow Dancing, etc.

What a variety of things is included in the meaning of the word "theatre"! *The building* where plays are given. You say "Let us go to the theatre," "I work in a theatre." *The part of the building* where the actors perform. *The art of the performers.* You say "He is interested in the theatre," "He serves the cause of the theatre." *Dra-*

matic literature, as, for example, *the Theatre of Shakespeare, the Théâtre of Molière. The specific dramatic effect* which is the aim to be attained by the technique of that literature and of stage management. People praise a play by calling it very dramatic or theatrical, or criticize it adversely by saying that it lacks the most essential quality — dramatic or theatrical appeal. And *that indefinable, traditional professional something* that is implied by the stage-director of a French theatre when, clearing the stage immediately before the curtain is raised, he claps his hands and shouts: " Place au théâtre! " . . . And what not. . . .

This long enumeration for which, I believe, I should apologize to the reader, seems to cover all, or almost all, the meanings and subjects usually implied in the word " theatre." Yet when *I* say " theatre," I think of none of these things.

I have been for thirty years a performer, an actor, a stage-director, a stage-manager and a playwright. My plays have been, and are being, produced in Russia, Germany, France, England, America, etc. In other words, I am about as much of a theatrical professional as one can be. And yet, when I say " theatre," I have in mind least of all the formal, pay-as-you-enter institution ostensibly maintained " for all," and quite fixed in place and time, as well as in the character of the performance.

When you say " food," you do not immediately think of a restaurant.

When you say " love," you do not think of a brothel.

In like manner, when I say " theatre," I do not have in

mind that which is nothing but a commercial exploitation of my instinctive liking for the theatre.

The theatre which you say you must have for entertainment, instruction or other purposes, is very far from being the theatre of my conception, which is something as essentially necessary to man as air, food and sexual intercourse. That is why, when I speak of the theatre, I want to emulate the famous Paracelsus Bombast of Hohenheim, who, before beginning his course of lectures at the University of Basel, burned all the books of his predecessors.

Theatre, as I understand it, is infinitely wider than stage. It is more valuable and necessary to man than even the highest blessings of modern civilization. We can live without those, and we actually did for thousands of years, as is known from the history of primitive man. But no man has ever been able to get along without the theatre as I conceive it.

Chapter II

THE THEATRE IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

HAVE you ever watched a cat playing with a mouse? If not, you have certainly missed a great deal, for it is a very interesting and suggestive show.

After the cat has released her hold on her little victim, the latter pretends most dramatically and skilfully to be dead. It neither moves nor breathes, preserving the position in which its torturer has abandoned it. Meanwhile the cat also "plays a rôle." She is, if you please, absolutely indifferent to the mouse. Sitting at a distance, she licks her paw, yawns, looks around. As soon, however, as the little "underground actress," deceived by this feigned carelessness, jumps up and takes to its heels, the cat throws off the mask and catches it. The show starts all over again. For is it not a show?

It is but natural for us to believe that the theatre is an essentially man-made thing. The stage, the side-wings, the footlights and electric signs — all these elements invariably associated in our minds with the very idea of the playhouse are products of our culture and history. We know that the theatre has slowly and gradually developed with mankind, that it has passed, from the dim and misty days of the Greek coryphaeus down to our epoch of elec-

tricity, radio and airships, through a long series of transformations and transfigurations. Every epoch, every period of our cultural development has reflected in the theatre, as in a mirror, its fondest thoughts, dreams and ideals, has used the stage as the tribune from which to proclaim new — or old — social, religious and moral theories. Indeed, what art or what institution has reflected man's soul and mind more thoroughly and more faithfully than the theatre? And what institution is, so to speak, more man-made than the theatre? It is in the theatre, if anywhere, that man may look with perfectly justifiable pride and satisfaction at himself and at his omnipotent mind, for it is here that he imitates the Creator, nay, that he becomes himself a Creator. He conceives new life, new reality, and he sees them impersonated. He makes his ideas live in the guise of human beings. He creates new worlds. If nature is ruled by its own laws which are often inimical to man, which man has to study and which he may, at the price of continuous efforts, use for his own ends, the theatre is ruled by man alone. Here, within the walls of a playhouse, he reigns supreme.

Such a conception of the theatre is common to all of us. It is, as it were, instinctively accepted by us with neither doubt nor reflection, as an axiomatic truth which necessitates no proofs, which is self-evident. And it takes mental effort and concentration to realize how inaccurate and superficial this conception of the theatre is. Indeed, are we justified in drawing such a sharp line of distinction between "nature" on the one hand and "theatre" on the other? Is "nature" limited to that which we politely

B. Aronson

call " the performance of natural functions "? Is " theatre " confined to the place where its buildings and electric signs are located? Does " theatre " not exist in " nature "?

Each one of us knows from his own experience examples of that which naturalists call mimicry. You see a little protruding spot on the trunk of a tree; but no sooner do your fingers touch it than it separates from the trunk and flies away sparkling with bright colours of its lower wings which have been concealed beneath the dark-grey, cork-like upper wings. Such instances of disguise are quite numerous, if not numberless, both in the vegetable and in the animal kingdoms. Nature resorts to most artistic and artful devices to conceal her creatures from dangers surrounding them on all sides.

Those who have travelled in the deserts of South Africa will never forget their inhospitable, greyish-yellow, deathlike aspect. Not a trace of vegetation, not a green blade around. You would never think that there were any plants there: you see nothing but sand, rocks and stones. But if you stop to examine a small pile of such stones, you will be surprised to discover that they are not stones at all, but live flowers. They are betrayed by their yellow blossoms, which bloom at midday and are shaped like little stars. If you pull out one of such " stones " you will find that the false appearance of a rock is assumed only by that part of the flower which is exposed, but that the part below is woody and has the shape of a long cone or of the root of a large radish. What especially enhances the striking similitude of the flower to real rocks in the vicinity is the coloration of its outer part. These " plant-stones " are

provided with exactly the same kind of specks and veins that are found on true stones. Animals seldom suspect the vegetable origin of these "stones," and in most cases pass by without paying any attention to them.

Should one wish to define more exactly this phenomenon of mimicry in nature, one could think of no better word than "theatre." In the case of the just quoted plant we see more than merely an instance of masquerading in nature, of "mask-wearing" for purposes of concealment. It is a genuine assumption of a "part" by an inanimate actor, the plant. It is quite a definite "part," and the seemingly defenceless plant must play it as best it can. The whole drama is an all but motionless, prudent pantomime. The actor selects the right place on the sandy stage and "plays the stone" all life long. And upon the realistic quality of its performance depends something more than the worthless success of a circus-juggler; the very existence of the actor is here at stake. The tragi-comedy of nature abounds in such silent pantomimes, which unfold themselves before our unobserving eyes in every garden, on every lawn, in every forest. For instances of mimicry might be quoted literally by the thousands. There are plants of one kind masquerading as plants of another kind. There are plants which assume the likeness of insects, turf, little dry sticks, etc. There are others which mimic the appearance of turtles, of white sheep, of caterpillars, of birds and so forth. The acting flower pretends to be dead when it is alive, sterile while it is prolific, absent from the scene though in reality it is present. The highly artistic masquerade, infinitely rich in devices and in wardrobe, goes

on around us in a never ending procession. Is this not "theatre"? Do not the little silent actors obey in their everyday behaviour the purely theatrical principle of "pretending to be different from that which one really is"?

As I am thinking of these facts it is getting increasingly evident to me that our human theatre, that is to say, "the pay-as-you-enter playhouse," made its appearance in the history of mankind not so much to gratify our "acting" instinct — for, as we shall see further, this instinct receives ample satisfaction even without the theatre — as to serve us in the discovery of this instinct. In other words, the rôle of our theatre is educational not in the vulgar, but in a wide, philosophic sense of the word.

I mean to say that the theatre is destined to play the same part in our understanding of life and nature as amber played in the acquisition of scientific knowledge. We know that for thousands of years amber was used only in the manufacture of beads, ear-rings, necklaces, brooches, cigarette-holders, mouthpieces of all kinds, and other such trifles. It was only since the great discovery of William Gilbert, in 1600, that amber acquired instructive value for mankind. Long before Gilbert it was known that this fossil resin, when rubbed with a piece of wool cloth, had the property of attracting light bodies. But he was the first to call this power of attraction *electric*, i.e., of amber, "electron" being the Greek word for amber. "Vim illam electricam nobis placet appellare." "It pleases us to call that force electric," Gilbert wrote in his book. In giving this name to the mysterious force, he was no more than just

to amber, without which humanity perhaps would be still ignorant of that fundamental property of matter which has overturned all previous theories regarding the structure of substances, and which in its practical application has revolutionized our whole existence.

Thus electricity received its name in honour of amber (electron), which played the rôle of a guiding star in the strenuous effort of mankind to solve the mysteries of nature.

The *theatre* is, perhaps, destined to play the part of amber in revealing to us new secrets of nature.

Regarded from this angle, mimicry may be not only a special case of convergence, as naturalists claim, but a special stage of theatrical development as well. This assertion is pregnant with inferences of the highest import to the philosopher, including the revaluation of the very concept of " naturalness."

Let us now turn to the theatre in the animal kingdom. " The theatre among animals! " — these words may sound paradoxical, not to say senseless, to many and may make more than one sceptic laugh. Nebulous and far-fetched analogies, remote comparisons and " poetic " assertions — such is, the reader may presume, the kind of material to which he will be treated in the present chapter. Those, however, who, together with Herbert Spencer, James and Groos, admit that animals possess the imitative faculty as we, men, possess it; those who recall that Aristotle regarded imitation as the essence of all arts; and those who have either observed or read that animal play is dramatic in character, will find nothing to astonish or

shock them in the assertion that there is a " theatre " among animals.

It must be said here that " plays in the animal kingdom " is the subject which has attracted long since the keenest attention of zoologists and psychologists. Hundreds of scientific researches have been, and are being, devoted to it. Indeed, it is in the analysis and in the investigation of this side of animals' activity that the shortest road to the understanding of their psychology seems to be. Yet most of the scientists say little, if anything, on the " theatrical " aspect of animal plays. In my opinion, however, it is exactly from this angle that the subject should be approached.

Read, for instance, the following passage from W. H. Hudson's " Naturalist in La Plata ":

" There are human dances in which only one person performs at a time, the rest of the company looking on, and some birds, of widely separated genera, have dances of this kind. A striking example is the cock-of-the-rock of tropical South America. A mossy level spot of earth surrounded by bushes is selected for a dancing place, and kept well cleared of sticks and stones; round this area the birds assemble, and a cock-bird, with vivid orange-scarlet crest and plumage, steps forward and, with spreading wings and tail, begins a series of movements as if dancing a minuet. Finally, carried away with excitement, he leaps and gyrates in the most astonishing manner, until, becoming exhausted, he retires and another bird takes his place."

Though it is an old-fashioned minuet, and not some

more modern dance with high kicks and splits, we have to admit that it *is* a *dance*, and that it is performed on a *stage* with *spectators* around. Who could deny the *theatricality* of this original and elaborate bird-play? But consider other examples. A zoologist might quote quite a list of birds which adorn their dancing floors with bright feathers, pebbles, shells and various other *decorations*. Thus, for instance, the tropical crow is so fond of these things that the natives of the regions where it lives always look for their lost ornaments near its "dancing establishments."

Indeed, bird-theatres are far from being primitive or unpretentious. They set a very high example of histrionics to the animal kingdom. Nor do the dances performed in these theatres consist of mere jumping or walking. Some of the birds, like, for instance, the so-called prairie turkey, execute complicated pirouettes, just as our grandfathers did in the period of rococo, advance two or four at a time, bow their heads, spread their wings over the ground, step backward and then forward again, turn on their toes and screech with merry voices.

Let us, however, pass from birds to higher animals whose psychology can be more accessible to us and whose life lies within the range of our daily experience.

Consider, for instance, a dog looking for hours out of the window or observing the world from an automobile. This "watching the parade" is truly suggestive. It has no other purpose than to take in mentally different street scenes and happenings, that is to say, to be a "spectator" in a "show." Arthur Schopenhauer was undoubtedly right

when he defined these observing proclivities of dogs as the " most human trait of animals."

But watch a dog playing with a bone, throwing it up, pushing it, keeping it in motion and growling, barking, assuming pugnacious poses at the same time, and you will agree with Herr Groos, one of the keenest students of the psychology of animals, that this is real, unquestionable acting accompanied by " conscious self-deception." And what if not conscious self-deception lies at the bottom of the theatrical play? The dog convinces itself that the bone is a fox, a little animal, a live being, and acts accordingly. Referring to this example, Herr Groos says:

" The origin of artistic fantasy or playful illusion is thus anchored in the firm ground of organic evolution. Play is needed for the higher development of intelligence. At first merely objective, it becomes by means of this development subjective as well; the animal, though recognizing that its action is only a pretence, repeats it, raises it to the sphere of conscious self-delusion, to the sphere of enjoyment from a make-believe fight. And this is the very threshold of artistic production."

Moreover, it may be asserted without fear of overstatement that dogs indulge in the presentation of whole " dramas," that is to say, of well-defined dramatic " themes." Consider the dogs' hunting-play. What is it if not a dramatic representation of flight and escape, or of chase and attack, enacted as an " improvisation " by two or more four-legged tragedians?

In a restricted sense one may even speak of certain parts of a " dramatic whole," in the use of which the animal ap-

proaches man. Note, for example, the prologue to the hunting scene enacted by the dogs of their own accord. Its significance lies in *agreement* among the participants.

Here is, for example, a young fox terrier leaping around the corner of a house to hide from another dog that is coming. Then follows the invitation to play, made in a very characteristic manner, with legs wide apart, a position well adapted to facilitate the rapid projection of the body in flight. All ready to start, it throws itself from right to left in a semi-circle several times, before the flight really begins. The other, in the meantime, is a fine picture of hypocrisy: it looks about with complete indifference, as if the whole affair were nothing to it. Now, however, the fun begins, as the leader springs forward, though not at full speed, and the other gives chase with enthusiasm. Should the pursuer overtake its mock prey, it tries to seize it by the neck or the hind leg, just as a dog does when chasing in earnest. The other, without slackening its pace, turns its head to defend itself by biting. Then a tussle often ensues. At last the players stand with tongues hanging out, breathing heavily, until one of them suddenly whirls around and the play begins anew.

Indeed, to deny the fact that animals do possess an equivalent of that which men call theatre, that they are provided by nature with the predilection for acting, that they make use of such specifically theatrical features as the stage, the stage-setting, the dancing, the dramatic impersonation, the dramatic subject (prologue, theme, acting), etc., would be unjustifiable blindness. We have a perfect right, the sceptical critics notwithstanding, to speak of the

theatre among animals as definitely as we speak of the *theatre among men*. Let it be added that, by viewing animals from a "theatrical" standpoint, we gain a new tangible proof of man's descent from ape-like ancestors, a new trait of resemblance between him and his humble four-legged relatives.

To conclude I will cite one more example of the theatre among animals. As we know, the drama among men, particularly among Greeks, developed from the *chorus* performing play-song-dances in their syncretic stage. In this oldest European theatre the chief rôle was played by the so-called *coryphaeus*, the forerunner of the actor. It is really noteworthy that a similar — person? actor? how should we call him? exists in the highest branch of the animal kingdom, among gibbons. The already quoted Herr Groos describes the performance of his functions in the following manner:

"In Summer when the beams of the morning sun have dispelled the night mists, these apes leave the shelter of the leafy trees to which they have clung all night. After satisfying their hunger, they have time before the heat of the day to indulge in social pleasures, which, as befits animals so serious, are free from the unseemliness that characterizes those of many of their relations. They now repair to the shelter of some gigantic monarch of the forest, the limbs of which offer facilities for walking exercises. The head of the family appropriates one of these branches and advances along it seriously with elevated tail, while the others group themselves about him. Soon he gives forth soft single notes, as the lion likes to do when he tests

the capacity of his lungs. This sound, which seems to be made by drawing the breath in and out, becomes deeper and faster as the excitement of the singer increases. At last, when the highest pitch is reached, the intervals cease and the sound becomes a continuous roar, and at this point all the others, male and female, join in and for fully ten seconds at a time the awful chorus sounds through the quiet forest. At its close the leader begins again with the detached sounds."

According to Charles Darwin, who knew of these operatic performances given by gibbons, their voices are piercing but quite musical. Moreover, the great scientist believed that the ascending and descending notes of the gibbon's song are each one tone higher (or lower) than the preceding, and that the highest note is exactly an octave above the first. The modulation of sounds, he maintained, is very musical, so that a violinist could easily play the melody of the whole song.

It is truly remarkable that the historians and philosophers of the theatre who search for its origins literally everywhere should have never honored with their attention this striking gibbons' song, nay, should have never honored with their attention the facts referring to the theatre in the animal kingdom in general. For what can be more suggestive than the sight of these man-like apes imitating, or, rather, forestalling, the Hellenic coryphaeus with his chorus? Indeed, the just described performance is enacted by gibbons after a meal (satiation). But didn't the word " scene," " stage," mean originally " a sheltered place," and, according to some authorities, also a " feast "?

And, by the way, is not the myth bearing on the origin of the Greek tragedy based upon the sacrificial " feast " that Icarus held together with his villagers? Are these — coincidences? analogies? equivalents? not full of mysterious significance? Add to this that the singing gibbons group themselves *around* their leader and that the Greek chorus danced *round* the altar in a circle, and you will understand how meaningful is this parallel. Indeed, one peeps here into the very depths of human, and animal, feelings and instincts, and one discovers the same theatre in embryo.

Men have for centuries used the words " nature " and " naturalness," on the one hand, and " theatre " and " theatricality," on the other, as diametrically opposed, as mutually excluding terms. Can we use them in the same sense now, after this brief survey of " theatre " in " nature "? Is there a justification for such a sharp distinction between these two categories? Is nature so " natural " after all? And do we really know what we are talking about when we use the word " natural " as the antidote to the word " theatrical "? It seems to me that the time is coming when we will at last realize that there is just as much " theatre " in " nature " as there is of " nature " in " theatre."

Chapter III

THE THEATRICAL INSTINCT

WHAT are the psychological foundations of our liking for the theatre? On what feelings is it based? Historians and students of arts have answered these questions in most dissimilar manners. It was asserted that the theatre developed out of religious ceremonies and rituals and that it was in the beginning, so to speak, a by-product of the religious feeling. It was also said that the origins of the theatre lay in the choreographic proclivities of the primitive man, that they must be sought in the general thirst of the human soul for aesthetic forms and images, that — etc., etc. I maintain, however, that all these explanations must be rejected and forgotten.

Man has one instinct about which, in spite of its inexhaustible vitality, neither history nor psychology nor aesthetics have so far said a single word. I have in mind the instinct of transformation, the instinct of opposing to images received from without images arbitrarily created from within, the instinct of transmuting appearances found in nature into something else, an instinct which clearly reveals its essential character in the conception of what I call theatricality.

The fact that man himself, though constantly paying tributes to this powerful instinct, has been unaware of its

existence, is, of course, no proof of its ephemeral nature, because in the evolution of the human self it is inevitable that the moment of our awareness of any feeling should be separated by centuries from the time when this feeling originated.

True, most of the manifestations of this instinct could not help but attract the watchful eye of science, but science, ever hasty in classifying phenomena, unhesitatingly consigned it to the aesthetical category.

The instinct of theatricalization which I claim the honour to have discovered may be best described as the desire to be "different," to do something that is "different," to imagine oneself in surroundings that are "different" from the commonplace surroundings of our everyday life. It is one of the mainsprings of our existence, of that which we call progress, of change, evolution and development in all departments of life. We are all born with this feeling in our soul, we are all essentially theatrical beings. In this a cultured man differs but little from a savage, and a savage from an animal.

Theatricality is pre-aesthetic, that is to say, more primitive and more fundamental than our aesthetic feeling, or feelings. It would be ridiculous to speak of the aestheticism of a savage. Indeed, who will conceive the felicitous idea of endowing him with the capacity of enjoying "beauty for beauty's sake"? But the sense of theatricality he certainly does possess. Hence, the theatrical art is essentially different from all other arts.

I remember that when I was yet a child I instinctively knew the difference between one and the other, between the

many-headed art which is aesthetic and the single-headed art which is theatrical. It was the theatre for me when I put on dark spectacles and my father's cape, and frightened the servants with my hoarse, terrifying voice of an imaginary intruder, while it was art to me when I was passionately absorbed in drawing and music. I should have been very much surprised if I had been told at that time that they both meant the same thing. How can it be maintained that they are the same? Is it not true that in the theatre the thing that I desire most is to be other than myself, whereas in art just the opposite is the case — I want to find myself, to pour out my innermost being in the sincerest form of which I am capable? What have the two in common? Is it creative power? But under such a generalization as that we run the risk of including in the same category the birth of a child and the making of a coffin. Is it aesthetic enjoyment? But in my childish use of the dark spectacles and of my father's cape one can hardly suspect a desire for aesthetic enjoyment.

The art of the theatre is pre-aesthetic, and not aesthetic, for the simple reason that *transformation*, which is after all the essence of all theatrical art, is more primitive and more easily attainable than *formation*, which is the essence of aesthetic arts. And I believe that in the early history of human culture theatricality served as a sort of pre-art, using this word in the generally accepted sense. It is exactly in the feeling of theatricality, and not in the utilitarianism, of the primitive man that one must look for the beginning of all arts. A savage bores a hole in his nose and puts a wishbone through it not for the purpose of

frightening away his enemies or carrying on war more effectively, but for the sheer joy of self-transformation. Is it not pathetic, indeed, that anthropologists find in the caves of primitive man not the ploughs, household tools or weapons, but bracelets, necklaces, odd-looking shells and other paraphernalia of the prehistoric masquerade? And is it not typical that the native woman of the western coast of Africa will gladly sell her honour for a button, because the shine of a button is of real theatrical value, but won't even look at a good piece of cloth with which she might cover her naked body?

That theatrical effect is more important to the savage than his physical well-being is evident from the following incident: In revenge for the death of Cook in Hawaii some Britishers set fire to a number of native villages. The natives fled, but, as soon as they found themselves out of danger, they stopped on the bridge and, amazed by the imposing sight of flames devouring their homes, burst out in outcries of enthusiastic admiration: "How wonderful!" Here are people who could find justification not only for Captain Cook, but even for Nero — the incendiary to whom Rome in flames appeared more interesting in the theatrical sense than the Rome which wearily preserved its time-worn treasures.

There is so much theatricality among the savages that only blindness or bias can account for the failure to recognize it as such. Consider tattooing, piercing of the skin, lips and teeth in order to put feathers, rings, pieces of crystal, metal and wood through them, the practice of removing incisors, pulling out the hair and deforming the

skull or feet — what are these evidences of the mania for transformation if not theatricality of the purest sort?

Strong, indeed, is the instinct of theatricalization. It drives the savage as hunger, sexual desire or love drives him. The cynical saying "Cherchez la femme" might well be replaced by "Cherchez le théâtre," for the history of mankind is all saturated with this instinct. The savage is often ready to pay with his life for the joy of becoming different from what he is. To theatricalize his body the native of Borneo makes more than ninety deep cuts into his skin. He is all washed in the streams of his own blood, and his sufferings, intensified by the tropical heat and by the insects infesting his wounds, are terrible. In order that the scars should be sufficiently prominent and duly spectacular, the wounds are kept open by additional cuts and other barbaric measures for a very long time, — according to Darwin the cruel operation often demands several years for its completion, and it frequently leads to blood-poisoning and to a horrible death. And yet the native of Borneo dreams of the day when the cruel proceeding which makes of him "a different man" will begin! In this he differs but little from the Indian of the Orinoco tribe who will work for two weeks or more in order to earn the money which will enable him to buy the costly pigments for tattooing that are going to transform his body into an object of general admiration.

However barbaric, these changes of appearance deserve our greatest interest and respect. They are the primitive man's first steps beyond the boundaries of nature towards civilization. Painting his skin red and blue, sticking a

wishbone through his nostrils, etc., the primitive man imagines himself different from that which he really is. He selects, so to speak, a " part " for himself. And then he begins to play this part. Is this not, roughly speaking, the psychological path of all social change, of all progress? The same instinct lies at the bottom of imitation. To imitate means to play the rôle of an acting character who, for some reason or other, has impressed our theatrical instinct.

The birth of a child, education, hunting, marriage, war, the administration of justice, religious ceremonies and funeral rites, — every important event in life is made by the primitive man (and not by the primitive man alone!) the occasion for a purely theatrical spectacle. His entire life is a succession of such " shows." Without the zest of theatricality life would be to him like tasteless food, like sufferings and privations without a beam of hope. As soon, however, as he begins to theatricalize, it acquires a new meaning, it becomes *his* life, something that *he* has created. He has transformed the life that was into a life that is different. Hence, he is the master of life, not its slave. Who gave the parrot its plumage? Nature. But man, this proud, strong, handsome being, does not depend upon nature. He can provide his own feathers if he wishes. Who gave the panther its spotted skin? Nature. But man took the skin from the panther and wrapped it around his shoulders which he had made so shiny, sweet-smelling, ornamented. He himself becomes a panther, or, rather, a super-panther, because in his dancing he can show not only how the panther scratches, but also how the panther is killed for this offence.

An interesting example of the rôle played by the theatrical instinct in the cultural development of mankind is to be found in the history of our clothes. Here is a naked savage woman. She has blackened her eyelids and eyebrows and dyed her hair in the vain, but worthy, attempt at looking like a flower. She does not strive to cover her nudity, but merely gives it a different aspect. Yet, as the savage progresses, decorations used by him with the purpose of adorning his body are getting more and more numerous and complicated. Finally, at a certain stage of theatrical evolution, some sort of costume crystallizes out of these decorations. Indeed, if man, and especially man living in the south, had no instinct of theatricality, he would have no clothes. In the north he would use them only during cold seasons, for what purpose would they serve in summer? It is not difficult to prove that chastity can play no part in the development of the costume, either, for the "clothes" of a savage often emphasize such parts of his, or her, body as chastity would require to conceal (an observation which applies in a great many cases to us, cultured people, as well). As to the feeling of shame, it certainly is a factor in the evolution of clothes. But this feeling must be understood here in the sense that the primitive man becomes in a certain period of his development ashamed of showing himself in the "natural" costume instead of an "artificial" one, in other words, of exhibiting his ignorance of the social etiquette which demands that the theatrical feeling of his fellow-men should be respected. Perhaps to this is added the fear of appearing incapable of exerting power over nature. At any rate,

it is the theatrical instinct which is responsible for the wearing of clothes in the early stages of man's civilization.

Let us, however, try to penetrate a little deeper into the psychological nature of the theatrical instinct. Where does it come from? When could it have stirred for the first time in the man's soul? It is not difficult to construe, at least roughly and approximately, the process of its awakening.

Just imagine a savage who is telling his brothers that he hunted with success, that he had a good meal, that he then swam across a very wide river, that a tiger attacked him, but he succeeded in escaping, while his wife succumbed, and that, fleeing from the tiger, he fell from a very, very high mountain. His brothers refuse to believe; he argues and gets excited. He is requested to explain where is that wide river which, he says, he crossed — and the very, very high mountain from which, he asserts, he fell. The savage is perplexed and embarrassed. At this moment his wife appears — she is in perfect health and bears on her body no marks of the tiger's claws. The savage is amazed. Meanwhile his brothers tell him that, instead of hunting, he lay motionless with his eyes closed under a tree, that is to say, *slept*. It is then that he begins to realize that, besides his ordinary "ego," there lives in him yet another "ego," and that this second "ego" is a very wonderful thing indeed, for it can leave this world of realities and wander in some other world which it has itself created. In other words, the savage begins to realize that besides his physical "ego" he has also a spiritual "ego," that man has a body and a soul and that this soul which

possesses the talent of staging such wonderful plays while one is sleeping must possess it, at least in some degree, also while one is awake. Of course, I do not mean to say that the savage went so clearly and logically from conclusion to conclusion as I am putting it here. But, however dim and hazy were his thoughts, he became aware of his gift of *imagining* things, of imitating reality with imagination, of beautifying his miserable life with his fantasy, that is to say, of theatricalizing.

It is only in his capacity of theatricalizer of life that the primitive man bowed for the first time to God, or to gods. For in order to believe in gods man had first to acquire the gift of conceiving these gods, of personifying them as a dramatist personifies ideas, feelings and passions. Were it not for this gift of transfiguration, of imaginative creation of things and beings that cannot be seen on this earth, man would have no religion. This assertion of mine finds convincing proof in the fact that ethnographers know of scores of tribes which have primitive, embryonic, yet undeniable, elements of the theatre in their life, but have as yet no conception of gods. In other words, man became first an actor, a player; and then came religion; "Commedia Divina" was preceded by "Commedia." It is for this reason that religious myths are essentially dramatic and theatrical, — this applies to the history of all peoples at the dawn of their existence.

The reader will now understand my assertion that the theatre as a permanent institution came into existence owing to the instinct of theatricality, but not to the religious, choreographic, aesthetical or any other feelings.

Psychologically speaking, there is but a step from the "masquerading" of the primitive man in his everyday life to the theatre in the narrow, technical sense of the word. Indeed, is it not natural for man who adorns his colourless existence by organizing shows under such pretexts as marriage, death, administration of justice, etc., to organize them also without pretexts, that is to say, to stage shows for their own sake? Hence the institute of professional players, of actors. That this institute comes into existence in the early childhood of a nation or of a race is proved by the fact that even in the inarticulate Africa we find a great demand for professional players. Some wild tribe of Niam-Niam has quite a class of wandering mimes and singers wearing extravagant clothes of purely theatrical appeal and enjoying general respect and admiration, while Banbars and Mandingos value their "troubadours" and entertainers to such an extent that they are considered inviolable even in time of war. Moreover, a number of tribes might be mentioned in which the functions of actors are assured by chieftains, "kings" and other rulers.

As we ascend the ladder of civilization we become more and more convinced that man progresses much more rapidly in the cultivation of his theatrical sense than in the cultivation of his other spiritual qualities. Let us recall Greece, where the theatre very early became a state institution, where the high office of ambassador was entrusted to a gifted actor, and where the passion for the theatre was so general that women often gave birth to children in the amphitheatre. The Romans candidly defined the sense of life by the phrase "Panem and Circenses" and saw in the

arena, along with the trained animals and prostitutes, the august personalities of Nero, Commodius and Heliogabalus.

In ancient Peru and Mexico, the most valuable gifts of royalty went to actors, among whom were princes and superior officers, all members of the large royal family. In China, interest in the theatre is so keen that not a single public dinner is held without the participation of actors, who, after offering the guests a veritable " menu " of fifty to sixty plays, perform the one selected, to the accompaniment of little bone sticks. And while the people spend whole days in the public theatres of China, eating, sleeping and tending their children there, at Pondicherry, in India, where realistic performances take up from four to seven evenings in succession, the audience of from six to seven thousand spend the night in the theatre, unable to leave the place of the greatest of all temptations.

What is really characteristic of all these early or primitive theatres is their essential conventionality. They are all pre-eminently non-realistic theatres. To us, cultured men of the twentieth century accustomed to realism on the stage, admiring the Moscow Art Theatre of Stanislavsky, etc., the " unnaturalness " of Hindu or Chinese playhouses seems striking indeed. Suffice it to say that the Chinese actor playing an important rôle in a historical play has to convey to the audience the impression that he is riding away on a horse by mere gestures, without having even a wooden horse or a stick to take the place of that animal. He has to peep out from behind a tree, but there is no tree on the stage, — the whole scene must be again

conveyed by mimic, gestures, movements. Moreover, the Chinese actor plays in a purely conventional mask, with a beard which does not look like a beard at all, in a costume which must be greatly beautified and patched up in more than one place by the imagination of onlookers in order to acquire a certain resemblance to the garments of the hero whom the actor impersonates. Everything, from beginning to end, is conventional in this theatre. Yet the audience looking at the performance of a play staged with such a hopeless poverty of theatrical means *does* believe that the actor rides away on a steed, that he peeps out from behind a tree, that the mask he wears is a face, that he is a hero!

It is again the sacred theatrical instinct that we witness here at work. The Chinese audience believes in all that and enjoys the play because its theatrical instinct fills the gaps seen on the stage, co-operates with the actor, transforms ridiculous masks into solemn and proud faces, transfigures conventionality into a new reality. When the soul rebels it does not submit to the facts imposed from without by reality; it dictates its own laws and forms to this reality. Give only a pretext, an allusion to the theatrical instinct, and it will achieve the rest: it will build magnificent palaces out of cardboard, it will transform a piece of satin into an ocean, it will make a king out of a miserable player wearing a paper crown.

Chapter IV

THE WILL TO THE THEATRE

IN our childhood we were always playing, imagining ourselves or the things surrounding us to be anything we wished them to be.

There is literally no human being who in his childhood did not play. What the child likes most is the theatre, that is to say, the transformation of actuality as given from without, into something that he himself creates.

C. A. Ellis and Stanley Hall, who made a special study of play with dolls, state that children are not satisfied with a purchased doll, that is to say, an assumed doll, but always try to make a doll themselves. Children like these dolls, i.e., these transformed pieces of wood or rag, so much that in "feeding" them they themselves often forget to eat. Watching a child at play is a most wonderful experience. The observer sees the child completely absorbed in his play. Whatever is vital, strong, attentive and enthusiastic in the child surrenders to this unreal, yet actual, life. Indeed, it is a rare instance of creative activity going on not in the secret channels of the mind, but before our very eyes.

The child is always acting. Reality does not interest him in the least. The important thing to him is "faire la guerre," to impersonate a "big horse," to give the dog a

ride in the sled. For him surrounding objects are only means of bold theatricalization. " And if you should suddenly stop him," says Jean d'Udine, " it would take some time before he returned to reality again. For in his imagined world of play the rhythm of his being was entirely different from the commonplace rhythm to which you forced him to return." This also accounts for the extraordinarily developed ability of children to make wry faces, grimaces, especially when they feel that they are attracting attention. For all these are nothing but manifestations of the child's irresistible instinct of theatricality.

The underlying idea of this instinct of theatricality we find expressed in the words of one of Ibsen's characters: " that which is, does not exist; but that which is not, exists." That is the " theatre " in the broad sense of the word. The child likes more than anything else in the world whatever relates to the manifestation of this theatricality, in other words, to that which it has been our custom to call " play." The child likes the beads worn by his nurse and the rattle with which she diverts him, more than the nurse herself. He likes the toys given him by his mother more than he does his mother. This last paradox, though it is not willingly accepted by mothers, is confirmed by psychologists on the basis of a simple experiment in which the loss of a favourite toy was found to be a real misfortune frequently endangering the health of the child, whereas the loss of the child's mother called forth only a purely theatrical interest in the funeral.

The fact that the child plays without compulsion, plays always, plays of its own accord, and that no one has ever

taught him how to play, how to make his own "theatre," proves that nature herself has planted in the human being a sort of "will to the theatre," and that the theatre is something infinitely greater than has been admitted by our philosophers of the theatre, something essentially different from what our dramatic critics believe it to be.

Mohammed himself could not resist the wise temptation of play, and when Isha, his nine-year-old wife, brought with her some dolls into the harem of the great prophet, he sat down and played with her, in spite of the fact that Islam forbids the use of effigies representing the human figure.

While among the Moslems this "will to the theatre" is emphasized by the "divine example" of the great prophet, among other nations gods themselves appear as characters in plays of one kind or another. Thus, according to the traditions of the Hupa tribe in California, play was invented by God and his Brother; the natives of the Hervey Islands believe that the gods Tane and Ronga invented the kite; the Bakairi of Central Brazil ascribe the origin of festive games to the divine brothers Keri and Kame. In India, the deities Apsaras and Gandarvas are the patrons of certain games, and their sporting talents are sung in odes and poems. The god Xolotl of the ancient Mexicans was the god of the ball game.

There is truly something divine in this "will to the theatre." "Every new-born child is entrusted by nature with the duty of creating its own world," says B. Malachie-Mirovich in his profoundly instructive work on the educational value of the toy. "All children have the ability to

create a new reality out of the facts of life. Not all have this ability developed in the same degree. But in all of them it is more highly developed than in the adult." This independent, individual, wholly arbitrary creation of a new reality from material furnished by the outside world is a form of creative energy to which no other adjective than "theatrical" can be applied. For no matter what one's view of the theatre may be, one will agree that the essence of the theatre is the creation of a new reality.

The child creates sometimes literally out of nothing; most trivial and insignificant material can satisfy him. He is a real little Creator who can work wonders even without clay. A paper crown makes him a king, a broomstick serves him as a horse, while the floor transforms itself most obligingly into the ocean. In his "Creative Imagination" T. Ribot quotes an example which, perhaps, will awaken in some of us the reminiscences of our own childhood. One of the children he observed was particularly fond of the letter "W" and called it "my dear old boy W." Another child, three years old, while writing the letter "L," added a little flourish to it and, surprised by its resemblance to a human figure, suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, he is sitting!" The next day, after writing the letter "F" upside down, he noticed his mistake and, writing another letter beside the first, stated: "They are talking to each other." With the smallest fragment of the endless world in its hands, that is to say, with any imaginable toy, the child endeavours to re-create not one but several possible pictures from life, with himself as the chief character. He strives with genuine pathos to anticipate and

live through that which is suggested to him by the general scheme of creation.

For myself, I may say that I awoke, a conscious Evreinoff (that is to say, fully capable of weighing eudemonic values upon the scale of theatricality), very early, when I was three and a half years old. I remember the day when my parents decided that I was sufficiently grown to attend a children's performance in the village of Pushkino. The famous Pushkino is memorable and dear to me for more than one reason: it was there that the Moscow Art Theatre originated, that V. E. Meyerhold's first Studio was begun, that other interesting ventures were started. It was also there that I wrote some years later my first musical dramatic work, a harlequinade called " The Power of Magic."

From that time on, my nursery was definitely divided by the rolled-up carpet into two parts: the auditorium and the stage. The auditorium was usually free of spectators (except for my governess, who was half asleep), while on the stage I re-enacted indefatigably, all day long and in the evening, all sorts of wonderful things that only the most excited childish imagination could evoke.

I look back to this first childish theatre of mine with a great deal of satisfaction. All normal, healthy children are fond of the theatre in one form or another, be it a moving-picture show, musical comedy, drama or fantastically heroic novels and recklessly imaginative games. Moreover, the intensity of the child's " will to the theatre," his early, conscious, active preoccupation with it, is the surest indication of his mental endowment. The biographies of

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Pushkin, Goethe, Schiller, Goldoni, Griboyedov, Dargomizhsky, Spielhagen, Mitskewich, Dickens, Gogol, Thackeray, Pisemsky, Flaubert, Wagner, R. Browning, Raphael, Ibsen, D. Gregorovich, Chekhov, — all relate that the interests of these great men in their childhood converged in the theatre, — the only field where the giants of the future exercised their childish powers in preparation for their later work as playwrights, actors and masters of the puppet show of life which we call fiction.

These biographical facts are particularly significant when contrasted with observations made in nurseries and hospitals, which establish the fact that slight interest or no interest in the theatre is characteristic of cretins, idiots, the mentally deficient and the children in a semi-animal condition. It seems that in this " will to the theatre " science may gain a psychological criterion of no mean value.

Chapter V

THE THEATRE OF FIVE FINGERS

DO you know anything about the theatre of Vierochka? About the little theatre of the little Vierochka?

If you don't I will tell you what it is.

She is only four years old, while her theatre is two years old. Really!

What a truly *conventional* theatre it is! Just as conventional as a theatre can be.

Yet — isn't it strange? — Vierochka has not yet read a single book on the *new* theatre. What a striking originality and independence of thought!

She does not seem to be concerned at all with these new scenic theories of ours! She behaves as though they were to her old boresome things which she has mastered long since and thrown into the waste-basket, — for hers is certainly a wonderful theatre.

I once attempted to draw her into a technical conversation on certain details of scenic equipment, such as costumes, scenery and, well, lots of other things. Lord, how she laughed! She made me repeat several times every technical expression, and she burst every time into such volleys of hearty, contagious laughter that I could not stand it any longer and, following her example, laughed myself to tears.

Only gods to whom wisdom, *real* wisdom, is an open book can laugh that way (or else my knowledge of mythology isn't worth a nickel).

I am very fond of little Vierochka's theatre.

First, it is a real theatre — not something that is "just like a real theatre," but exactly a hundred per cent "real theatre." There is nothing in it that would be "unconvincing" or "unlike the truth." Everything is here "convincing," everything — just as it should be. The creative convincingness reaches here its very pitch; indeed, there is nothing above it to be desired. It is true that the creator and the spectator are here fused in one person; but is it not in this fusion that lies the very secret of theatrical illusion?

Second, this theatre of Vierochka is dominated by *one* creative will. Hence, all is reduced in it to *one* scenic denominator, and the uniformity of style is impeccable.

Third, it is filled with scenic images of throbbing vividness which require no artificial strings or springs to live and move. It isn't, gentlemen, some theatre of marionettes: you do not see the threads, because there are no threads in it.

Fourth, a new play is performed here during every presentation. The imagination of the playwright who reigns here is inexhaustible.

Fifth, mark me, Vierochka's theatre can do very well without any public. Nay, the presence of the public is even undesirable (can you beat it?).

Sixth, . . . Well, I see that if I let myself go on I will never come to an end. For years of patient research and

volumes of erudite writings are required to enumerate and describe the qualities and achievements of this magic theatre! Magic it certainly is, for everything is done here as it were by a magician's word. And for this even the magician's wand is not required! (Sure enough, everybody could do it with a wand; give me the wand and I will prove it.)

I have worked a great deal in the theatre, — as a master, as a labourer, in all capacities. I have read and written a number of books on the theatre, too. To make a long story short, the theatre is a subject with which I am familiar. Yet I emerge from Vierochka's nursery as a thrilled, charmed, enchanted ignoramus admiring in silence the mysterious perfection of unfathomable achievements, as an ignoramus who should be thrown into the waste-basket in which lay the scholastic nonsenses of other ignoramuses. As to the theorists of the theatre who do not even want to hear of Vierochka's theatre, I would better refrain from passing a verdict on them.

Take Vierochka away from her nursery, from her dolls and toys, and you will see that you are powerless to deprive her of her theatre. You will see how wisely she plays with the five tiny fingers of her left hand.

I am sure that neither Hofmann nor Paderewski nor Sarasate could use his fingers in a more wonderful manner.

Each of her tiny fingers has a name: the thumb is "Vova" (Uncle Vova), the forefinger is "Auntie Tanya," the third finger is "Fedya" (a tall college-boy), the fourth, "Mamma" (it is on this finger that the wed-

ding-ring is worn), and the little finger, " Petya " (Vierochka's son).

This cast plays in Vierochka's theatre most amusing comedies. " Uncle Vova," for example, meets " Mamma," they kiss and begin to talk about the wicked and the stupid " Fedya "; for, though a big boy, " Fedya " keeps annoying the little " Petya." " Petya " wants to sleep (here the little finger bends down to the palm), but " Fedya " begins to pinch and squeeze him (the third finger bends aggressively to the little one). But " Petya " is small and weak, and everybody can hurt him, not to speak of " Fedya, the big brute." Here " Mamma " with " Uncle Vova " try to devise a punishment for the aggressor. Then suddenly appears " Auntie Tanya." The three, of course, talk of this and that, of the toys they have bought for children, of people they have seen. " Mamma," as it were inadvertently, says how cruel " Fedya " is to " Petya." And when " Fedya " comes, " Auntie Tanya " gives him a jolly good beating. He begins to cry, but this touches neither " Mamma " nor " Uncle Vova ": Why did he annoy (they say) the little " Petya " who wanted to sleep, who is weak, whom everybody can hurt?

Oh, wonderful playwright! Oh, unsurpassed stage-manager! Oh, genius of inventiveness! There is truly no wonder that could not be achieved by the all-conquering will to the theatre.

Chapter VI

THE NEVER ENDING SHOW

AT the beginning of the sixteenth century Erasmus of Rotterdam shocked the mediaeval minds of his contemporaries by a daring question. "What, after all, is human life," he asked in his immortal masterpiece, "if not a continuous performance in which all go about wearing different masks, in which everyone acts a part assigned to him until the stage director removes him from the boards?" "Of course, on the stage," the great Erasmus added, "certain things are coloured too brightly and overemphasized, but both on the stage and in real life there is the same make-up, the same disguise, there are the same everlasting lies!"

This, I repeat, was written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, while in 1589, on the other side of La Manche, the famous Globe Theatre was already in existence. The signboard over its entrance, which represented Atlas supporting the globe on his shoulders, bore the convincingly laconic inscription: "Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem," that is to say, "All the world is a theatre." For the benefit of those to whom the meaning of these words was not quite clear, Shakespeare, in 1600, inserted into "As You Like It" his famous monologue on the identity of life and the theatre:

" All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. . . ."

Of course, Shakespeare and Erasmus were not the first ones to enunciate this truth. Suffice it to say that some fifteen centuries before them Marcus Aurelius compared man with an actor who " was dismissed from the stage by the same praetor who had invited him on the stage." Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun. Yet, however old this truth may be, most of us do not realize its full significance. As Molière's famous hero talked all his life long without knowing that " il faisait de la prose," we live without realizing that our life is from beginning to end the acting of a theatrical part, or, rather, of several theatrical parts. We are neither savages nor children, and the acting in which we daily indulge naturally differs from that which may be witnessed in a cave or in a nursery. Yet the essence remains the same. Though not sticking wishbones through our nostrils, we pay tributes to the theatrical instinct at every moment of our existence.

An excellent illustration of this truth was once given to me by an occurrence which might seem at first sight trivial, uninteresting and unimportant. Years ago, I often visited the house of the great Russian artist Ilia Riepin, who lived then in Finland, not far from Petrograd. He was working at that time on my portrait, which naturally made me his frequent guest. Mr. Riepin's wife, the late Mrs. N. Nordman-Sieverova, was a very brilliant and talented

woman, yet she had a mind prone to rather unusual extravagances and originalities.

In spite of the fact that she belonged by birth to an aristocratic Russian family, one of her whims was the mania for the most complete "democratization" of social life. In order to set an example of such "democratization," this gallant woman-reformer organized in her house the famous "Wednesday dinners" at which, alongside of numerous guests, the servants, euphemistically referred to as "assistants," were invited to table. True to her principle, the lady of the house honoured with her attention, with her polite questions and elegant conversation all the dining company, a chambermaid of hers just as much as an outstanding journalist or painter who came from Petrograd.

I will never forget the sight of the unfortunate "assistants" placed in uncustomary conditions. Indeed, the face of a gardener, or waiter, who sat on one of those "Wednesdays" in front of me bespoke such sufferings that it was a torture to look at him. To hold the knife and fork in the right way, to eat without making too much noise with his nose and mouth, to determine the quantity of food he could take on his plate without infringing upon the rules of etiquette, — all this was such a labour for the poor fellow that he blushed, sweat, breathed with difficulty and looked utterly miserable. And here, oh, tragedy! Mrs. Nordman-Sieverova would ask him, with all the charm of attentiveness, some banal question which he had to answer with ease, promptness and politeness. The "assistant" looked around in complete despair, not know-

ing what to do, choking with a piece of food which he hurried to swallow, feeling himself completely lost. His bloodshot eyes and the swollen veins on his forehead demonstrated clearly enough that these " democratic dinners " were for him the worst imaginable punishment. Yet, it might seem, what could be more " simple " and more " natural " for a man than to sit at a dinner table and dine " simply " and " without ceremony " in the company of other men! The fact is, however, that that which a well-bred man calls " naturalness " is quite a science necessitating long years of training, experience and education, in other words, a *rôle* which becomes our " second self " but which we cannot learn in one day.

It is only after having witnessed the strenuous efforts of my poor, blushing vis-à-vis at Mrs. Nordman-Sieverova's dinner that I have realized how complicated and rich in dramatic effects is the rôle of the " well-bred " or " cultured " man and how completely " unnatural " is that which is called in society " naturalness." Indeed, there is not a word of exaggeration in the assertion that

> " All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players. . . ."

We are constantly " playing a part " when we are in society. Max Burkhardt is perfectly right when he speaks in " The Theatre " of the " natural tendency to act which manifests itself unconsciously in every man whenever he feels that he is being observed. This tendency causes him to simulate the external indications of certain mental processes, thoughts and sentiments so convincingly that he him-

self begins to believe in the sincerity of these external indications." All our education is the process of learning the part of an "urban," sympathetic, sensible, collected and courageous human being, that is to say, the part of the favourite hero of the modern drama of life. Look at a young man talking to an attractive girl. Are his speech and his behaviour not the theatre of the purest water? What an infinite wealth of theatrical meanings is implied in every word, in every smile, in every intonation of his! Does he not try instinctively to convey to his interlocutor that he is strong, daring, gallant and noble, that he is a real "he-man," that he knows how to love and how to please a woman? She sees a wound in his hand, — "Isn't that terrible! What is it?" — "Oh, nothing, a trifle, a scratch," and the description of a sporting feat, told in a perfectly "indifferent" tone, follows. Uncipher these words and this tone, and you will see what a variety of effects is implied in them. And as he thus unfolds his peacock's tail, she plays still more subtly and cleverly, still more skilfully and effectively.

"Whenever a man strives long and persistently to appear someone else," Nietzsche says in his "Menschliches, Allzumenschliches," "he ends by finding it difficult to be himself again. He who constantly wears the mask of kindliness is bound in the end to acquire power over that benignant mood which alone makes the display of kindliness possible. Thus the new mood gains power over him and he actually becomes kindly." Yes, it is perfectly true that people often succeed in living up to the mask they are wearing. In this lies the infinite cultural value of our

"never ending theatricalization of life." State, society and civilization impose upon us a certain mask of virtue, kindness and decency. And we play our rôles so zealously as to mistake this mask for our real selves. Indeed, how terrible life would become were it not for this praiseworthy theatricality of ours! "Some live," Nietzsche adds further, "in constant fear of their ideal, which they should like to renounce, but which they obey. They are afraid of their nobler ego, because once this ego is permitted to express itself, it becomes an exacting master."

We like to see ourselves theatricalized. You will find proof of this in the way you approach the looking glass. As you look in it you mimic the appearance of greatness, attractiveness, imposing earnestness, decision, etc. What we want to see in the mirror is not objective truth but flattery, consolation, encouragement. . . . And without knowing it, we ourselves often help the mirror to flatter us, console or encourage. We always blame the mirror when we don't look well. And we are right, as Nietzsche is in his aphorism: "'I did it,' said my memory. 'I could not have done that,' said my pride, and remained inflexible. In the end memory yielded."

Examine a little more carefully than usual the album of photographs in your own home or in the home of your friends. Study the postures, the smiles, the family groups, or the faces looking out of the window overgrown with ivy. Scrutinize all these figures "outside the house fence," these young men "riding horses" or "playing tennis." Note the rolled-up sleeves and dishevelled hair. Behold

these remarkable girls in so-called "peasant" costumes, these stout ladies fanning themselves, wearing evening gowns and displaying with "nonchalant" smiles more of their legs than one should like to see. There is really no difference between Nietzsche flaunting the uniform of a Prussian soldier, an unsheathed sabre in his hand, and our own senators, ambassadors or presidents who have their pictures taken in their "working clothes," "at home," "at a hunting party," as if caught unawares. What a variety of "democratic," "aristocratic," "philosophical" and other poses! And what a wonderful faithfulness to the principle of theatricality in all!

Ah, this celebrated naturalness, comical and suggestive in its naïveté: Oscar Wilde was perfectly right when he called it "the most difficult of parts."

Whenever I look at such photographs I rejoice at the opportunity to find out which of the theatrical moments of his life the subject thought the most successful, which of these moments his taste had chosen to perpetuate for all time, what kind of theatricality in general appealed to him as the noblest. (How often will such analysis enable you to discover a cook in the person whom you blindly thought to be a countess!)

Yet man "plays a rôle" not only when he is seen by others. He continues to "act" even when he is alone, when he is left entirely to himself. Moreover, he is at such moments not only a "player," but also a "playwright" and a "stage director."

As soon as we are given a chance to concentrate we begin to think either of our future or of our past, for, strictly

speaking, there is no present. Suppose we are thinking of the future of our business. We review in our mind the transactions to be made, the important and unimportant things to be taken care of. We have a visual perception of people working at our office. We picture to ourselves the success that may crown our enterprises or the failure that may ruin us. " If this happens, what will Mr. So-and-So say to me? What will be the expression of his face? What a grimace will he make! " We see Mr. So-and-So's mimic, we relish in our mind the clever and caustic answer by which we will knock him down, we hear the hearty and approving laughter of those who sympathize with us and who detest him. What is all this, if not the staging of a whole play which we ourselves have invented and in which we act as the leading character?

The same theatricalizing genius is at work in us when we recall the events of our past (no matter whether it is the events of yesterday or of ten years ago). We cause these events to unfold again before our mental eyes. In other words, we compose a historical play, monodramatic in character. We stage it, and we ourselves appear in it as spectator and critic. We sometimes like to produce pleasant suspense by changing the sequence of events, by introducing characters that had no part in the real event. We invent a new dénouement. (" What if he should answer thus and so? " we make ourselves imagine, or " suppose Mr. So-and-So entered," or " what if she noticed that my dress was in disorder and that I was embarrassed? " etc.) With such dramatic distortion of the history of the event it sometimes happens that that which we see becomes

utterly absurd. We like it and do not like it at the same time; we are both ashamed and afraid of it. But the Demon of theatricalization lodged in the darkest channels of our brain spurs us on, excites our imagination and spreads out before us the very same nonsensical scene, unfolds it endlessly, until cold sweat appears on our brow.

This Demon, or Angel, does not release its hold on us even when we are sleeping. The illustrious Sigmund Freud maintains in his brilliant "Psychology of Sleep" that a dream almost always consists of visual images which very seldom "give an exact and faithful reproduction of actual happenings." It is, he tells us, a pictorial realization of a subconscious wish which the dreaming person accepts because it is offered to him in the form of sight perception (things visual, that is to say, theatrically real, and especially convincing to us). "To dream," Freud asserts, "it is necessary to submit the psychic material to a process of condensation, internal fragmentation, transposition, and, finally, to the selective action by which elements most suitable for the development of a situation are picked out. By imagining the effort required in order to substitute for some newspaper editorial or court address a series of equivalent pictures, we may form an idea of the work that must be accomplished by the dreaming mind in order to produce a dream. The most abstract thought is dramatized in the dream without the least participation of our conscious self. Moreover, if there is no connexion among the elements of the desire, or among the desires, hidden in the dream, it becomes the aim of the dream to provide

the connecting links and to make thus possible the presentation of a unified dramatic whole."

The famous psychologist has here given us a lucid and penetrating picture of the very essence of our subconscious self, and has proved that this self is pre-eminently dramatic and theatrical in its mysterious activity. Is this strange author of dreams so masterfully described by him not a real "playwright" and "stage manager"?

The dream is a drama of our own invention. It is a monodramatic theatre in which one sees oneself in an imaginary reality as if on some gigantic cinematographic film. And what thrilling plays are sometimes staged upon the ethereal boards of this playhouse! Indeed, it isn't for nothing that Maeterlinck drops in his "Death" the wise aphorism: "Each one of us, while dreaming, is a real Shakespeare."

But take a simpler example. Suppose that you are lying on the grass, that you have dismissed from your mind all earthly troubles and that your gaze is wandering idly in the skies. The clouds float by and you see them assume the shape of strange buildings, monks, maidens, mountains and monsters. It is not difficult to understand that all these images are imposed upon the clouds by your constantly theatricalizing mind, for the resemblance between a cloud and a monk or a monster is so remote. In other words, you make the clouds re-enact before your enchanted eyes a magic mystery play with a beginning unknown to you and a conclusion you will never see. "Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem," — "all the world is a theatre." Suggestive words, no doubt. Yet the builders of the Globe The-

atre would have been more precise if they had written over its entrance: "All the world is a theatre because man's mind wills it to be a theatre."

Perhaps it is the same thirst for theatricalization that makes of a drunkard the slave of the bottle. For it is not alcohol, as such, that he values, but the new self-consciousness that it gives, the new ability to dream, the new sweep of imagination, the quality and scope of newly gained power of dramatization. Alcohol widens his scenic repertoire. He now can play rôles of which he had no idea while he was sober. Observe him while he is drinking: his eyes glisten, his face shines, his distorted logic works with the speed of radio. He is no longer himself, although he is the same person. He is capable of doing almost anything at the moment: he imagines himself to be a hero and a knight, an unsurpassed fighter and boxer, a caveman chasing a woman, and he acts accordingly. He has reappraised all values, reconsidered all rules of everyday life. He is a new person in a new and irresistibly interesting world.

Why does our mind indulge in theatricalization? Why do we take pleasure in it? It would be senseless to ask these questions, for they cannot be answered. As the reader knows, theatricality is an instinct, and no instinct can be explained, that is to say, translated into the terms of logic. Why do we love? Why do we submit to the instinct of self-preservation? Instincts are essentially "thoughtless," "wordless" and "unsyllogistic." Hence it is impossible to boil them down to a certain sequence of words, thoughts and syllogisms. Yet, in so far as mind can illus-

trate instincts, the theatrical instinct finds an illuminating illustration in Nietzsche's following aphorism: "To reject the practical, to change the purposeful into the purposeless, the necessary into the arbitrary, and to do it in such a way as to cause no harm, by simply imagining it, out of sheer playfulness, affords joy and pleasure, because it frees us for the moment from the fetters of the necessary, the purposeful and the practical." Yes, our essentially anarchical self finds pleasure in turning the world upside down, in turning the laws of nature inside out, in making life and history run counter to their normal, commonplace course, in dramatizing and theatricalizing the dull routine of our everyday life.

A few years ago, while I was still in Russia, I made a trip to Sudzha, in the province of Kursk. It is a wretched provincial city with unpaved, sprawling, dusty, muddy streets and hovels nestling close together. The most attractive sight in Sudzha is the Nikolas Realschule. The most interesting part of it is the garden, to the right of the school. The most interesting thing in the garden is a monument to Michael Semeonovich Schiepkin, the greatest Russian actor, who began his career in Sudzha. The most interesting thing about this monument is the inscription on the black marble, in golden letters:

"For me, to live means to act on the stage, and to act on the stage means to live."

The fact that the monument to the man who uttered these words is located in the garden of a school is of course not a mere accident to one who is accustomed to find symbolic significance even in insignificant things.

"For me, to live means to act on the stage, and to act on the stage means to live."

These golden words are Sudzha's second sun, and, in the eyes of a geographer playgoer, they redeem the city's wretchedness, ugliness and lack of comfort. The actor uttered them not only for himself but for all of us.

Indeed, life is ruled by the theatre.

How, if not by theatricality, can one explain the fact that persons of excessive modesty, who have no confidence in themselves, who always distrust their own abilities, who cannot be, and apparently do not wish to be, conspicuous, always fail? Their manner of asserting themselves is in some fatal way devoid of force and appeal. Full of endless apologies, reservations, stammerings, they are repulsively tiresome and annoying in spite of all their virtues, because even virtues must have a scenic appeal to be attractive, and modesty needs the aid of theatrical hyperbole to gain its reward.

Everything is under the sign of the theatre.

How, if not by theatricality, can one explain our slavish obedience to fashion, which decrees with childish despotism that things be stretched, pulled up or pulled down, transposed, lengthened, shortened, gathered, bound and cut, twisted and inflated or worn upside down, and which always shifts and shuffles and flaunts itself?

Consider the desire to appear younger or older, not to look like a "cake-eater," or to look like one, to hide one's defects, or, on the contrary, to flaunt them, to figure, metaphorically speaking, in some masquerading costume. Is this not evidence of theatricality which reveals itself

everywhere, at the bottom of the rouge box of an old matron, as well as in the perfume bottle of "His Excellency," in the hair-dye transforming a grey beard into a black one, as well as in every added piece of leather in the heel of the undersized, on the edge of a razor, as well as on the teeth of the comb?

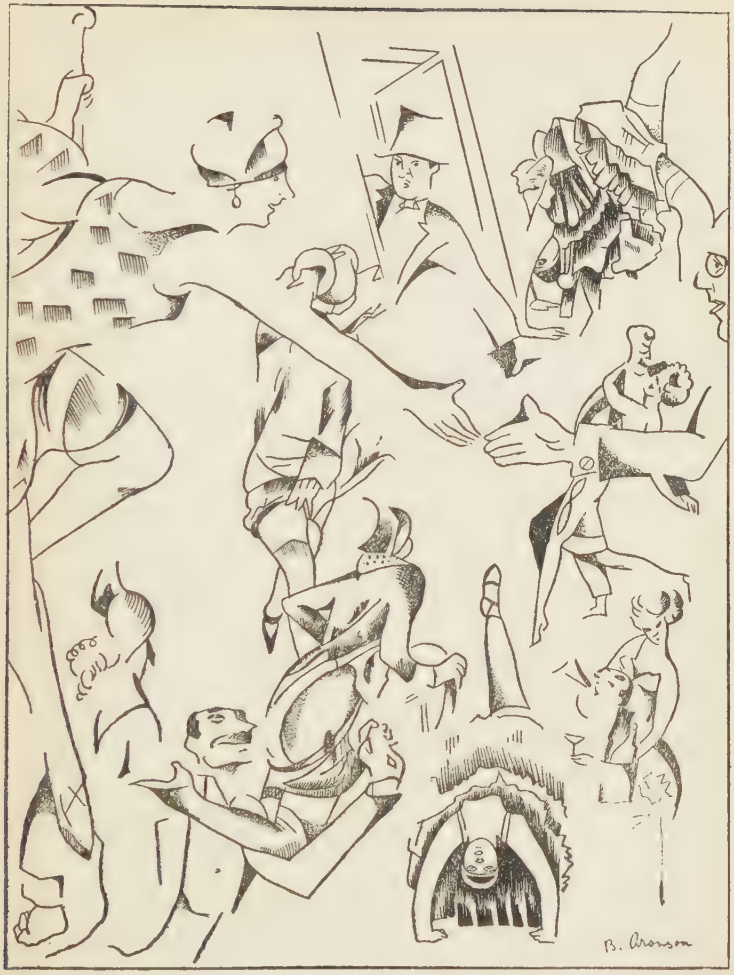
There are elements of theatricality in every department of our life, in every branch of our activity. Consider any spiritual function of man which, at its face-value, has nothing to do with the idea of the theatre, and you will almost invariably discover in it seeds of "play" and "show." Take, for instance, our speech.

In his novel "Gemulde," Tieck makes one of its heroes, a cut-and-dried pedant, inveigh with all possible vehemence against the use of theatrical expressions in our speech. Yet the pedant stops in the middle of his monologue, perceiving to his disgust and shame that he is himself using theatrical expressions all the time. He says: "Whenever a man compares one thing with another he lies. Consider, for example, the phrase, 'the dawn scatters its roses.' Is there anything sillier than that? Or the phrase, 'the sun sinks into the sea.' What idiotic nonsense! Or, 'the morning awakens.' There is no morning: how, then, can it sleep? It is just a part of the sunrise. But, excuse me, the sun does not rise, either. This is all nonsense and poetry. Ah, if I only had power over speech, I would cleanse it most thoroughly. In this ever lying world one cannot say a word without uttering foolishness."

It is, however, at least questionable whether the poor pedant would be able to "cleanse" the speech of "the-

atrical expressions" (this is again a "theatrical expression," for our speech is neither a candlestick, nor a door-knob to be cleansed) even if an unlimited power to carry out such a reform were given to him. No sooner do we open our mouths than the eruption of "theatrical expressions" begins. Man theatricalizes not only when he tells his sweetheart or wife that he is "dying" to see her, but even when he advises an obnoxious salesman or creditor to "go to h——." Our speech is all spun of comparisons, metaphors, approximations, ambiguities, exaggerations, overstatements and understatements. You cannot strip it of these decorations, of these theatrical garments, for they have naturally grown out of it. There is theatricality even in such expressions as "old boy," "old chap," "a mouthful of water," not to speak of the purely "poetical" "son of a gun." In order to greet a friend or ask for a drink of water without being theatrical, one would have to stutter for a few minutes in search for the right words.

Equally theatrical is our literature. A novel is always a puppet-show of life, and writing is always equivalent to the staging of a play. In order to blow life into his heroes the writer has to transform himself into each one of them. He has to play mentally their rôles, to wear their masks. Sometimes he virtually begins to forget himself behind these beings created by his imagination. When a friend came to Balzac to offer his condolence on the occasion of the death of the great writer's sister, Balzac said: "This is all very sad, my dear, but let us return to the reality and talk about Eugénie Grandet." For the unreal Eugénie Grandet was at that time more real to him than


B. Aronson

the rest of the world. Perhaps a still better example of the theatrical enthusiasm which makes the writer cease to be himself may be found in a letter written by Flaubert at the time when he was working on "Madame Bovary": "What pleasure it is to compose, to be no longer oneself, to transmute oneself into the beings one creates! To-day, for instance, fancying myself a man, a woman, a lover and his beloved at the same time, I thought I was taking a ride on horseback one afternoon in Autumn under the yellow foliage of the forest, and I felt as if I were a horse, the foliage, the wind, a part of the speech of my characters and the glowing sun which made them lower their eyes drunk with love." But to imagine oneself different from that which one really is, is the very essence of theatricality.

Moreover, in order to unfold the story of a human life, or of human lives, a writer has to select salient and characteristic moments, to submit these moments and scenes to the rules of dramatic development, that is to say, to stage a whole play. Only such literature in which there is "plenty of the theatre" can have a strong appeal to our mind and heart. Do not the works of Homer, Dante, Goethe, Voltaire, etc., constitute a real theatre in the sense that the mainsprings of their effects lay in their dramatic picturesqueness, in fundamentally rhetorical qualities of their narrative, in the "stagy" quality of their design, in their effective images, colours and backgrounds, to say nothing of other theatrical elements contained in them?

Especially does this apply to poetry. "Rhythm and rhyme," says Schopenhauer, "are a disguise which the poet assumes in order to express that which otherwise he would

not be able to express. It is exactly this disguise that gives us pleasure. If one could penetrate into the mysterious workshop of the poet's mind, one would come to the conclusion that nine times out of ten the thought is adapted to the rhyme, and that very often it has to make certain concessions to the latter. Even trivial thoughts sound significant when they are clothed in rhyme and rhythm, just as maidens of ordinary appearance look almost beautiful when they are dressed with taste and elegance." To write means exactly to " clothe " one's thought in words, in theatrical garments.

Examine any other branch of human activity and you will come to similar conclusions. You will see that kings, statesmen, politicians, warriors, bankers, business men, priests, doctors, all pay daily tributes to theatricality, all comply with the principles ruling on the stage.

The important thing is to realize that at least three fourths of our life are spent in an imaginary world.

Then we shall realize also that the " theatre in the abstract " dominates everything and that the population of our planet is governed not by democracies, aristocracies, autocracies or plutocracies but by a *theatrocracy*. This is the only lasting " régime," which stands above all political régimes, which reveals itself in all political régimes, which can be overthrown by no revolution and which will survive all evolutions.

In order to understand that this is neither a " façon de parler " nor an exaggeration, try to subtract from your life the hours when you are attitudinizing and playing parts, or watching others attitudinize and play parts. Subtract,

if you can, the hours when you see in your thoughts the realization of some hope which is yet to be realized or the vague recollection of some forgotten happening. Eliminate dreams, those fantastically mystical pantomimes, where the author and the spectator are fused in your subconscious ego. Eliminate the theatrical ceremonial of life: the hours of play in your childhood, past and present, the time spent in imitating your friends or simulating their peculiarities, the nights at the theatre which you began to visit long since, or your reminiscences of such nights. Eliminate the hours you spent in reading plays and novels, which are nothing but a drama unfolded before you in the pages of a book. I say nothing of the hours when you read dramatic reviews and criticisms of the stage, when, lured by the theatre, you mentally become this or that performer, author, critic or stage director. Nay, eliminate from your life the hours when you play the hypocrite, the moments when you act in keeping with the rules and conventions of polite society, the long succession of hours when you display the good manners of a gentleman; eliminate all that, and you will understand how ridiculously little is left to the non-theatrical side of life.

You will understand that you are really a faithful subject of the universal theatrocracy, and you will agree that your life is a continuous theatrical performance.

The main thing for us is *not to be ourselves.* This is the theatrical imperative of our souls. Truly, when, after a long series of transformations, Ibsen's Peer Gynt became himself again, there was nothing left for him but to die. And how pitiful did Solweig's lullaby sound then!

As an Encore

"All this is perfectly true," a friend of mine, an actress, said to me after a long conversation on the subject of the "never ending show." "Of course, we all act in life, perhaps even better than on the stage, although we are not paid for it."

"Not paid for it?" I rejoined. "You are mistaken. We are always paid for acting in life, and even very generously at times. Are we not compensated when we gain respect, love and sympathy for the characters we represent (let us admit that in our animal egotism we are incapable of evoking such feelings for ourselves)? And what about the profits we derive from the respect, love and sympathy of others? Do they not lead to true riches? And then, besides material — and perhaps ephemeral — benefits, do we not gain also spiritual benefits of real value to us?"

"Just what do you mean?"

"I mean the acquisition, through the act of self-transformation, of new feelings, new sensations, new conceptions of the world we live in. In this transfigured reality we remain the same as we were, and yet we become different, we see ourselves in a better, nobler, brighter light. You will admit that that is a considerable gain. A new sense of life — is that not more valuable than a new dress, a new bracelet, a new car?"

"Why, you're getting quite philosophical, not to say tiresome. That is not the stuff I want from you. I merely referred in a casual way to acting without reward, and you

took advantage of it. What I want to ask is something entirely different. It is this: are you sure that we are really playing a part *all the time?* "

" Of course."

" Well, take the case when we are crying, when we are suffering, or when a mother is giving birth to a child, and other occurrences in life too embarrassing to mention. Do you really think that even then we are acting? Is that not going too far? I understand perfectly well what the scientists mean when they compare the world to a theatre, when they say that people in life are just like actors on the stage, etc. I not only understand it, but I can cite thousands of instances from my own experience to prove it. Sometimes, when the stage director keeps me at a rehearsal a little longer than I expected, and I am in a hurry to see my dressmaker, I ' grow pale,' roll up my eyes, press my handkerchief to my mouth as if I were not feeling well, and the thing is done. ' Go home and rest yourself until it's time for the performance,' the stage manager will say. I can see how that fits in with what you say. It is pure acting. But let us take another case. Suppose I am touring the country with our cast and stop at a disreputable-looking hotel in some little provincial city. There are dirt and filth everywhere. . . . Briefly, I am referring to bedbugs. Now, according to you, even when I am fighting off these horrible intruders with the keenest feeling of disgust and terror, the whole procedure is nothing but a ' theatre for myself '? "

" It may be. You know very well that your imagination always exaggerates the danger. They say in Russian

that ' fear has large eyes,' which means that fear may become a stimulus to theatricality in a ' dangerous situation ' which it has itself created. Furthermore, when we are not ' spectators ' in the life-drama unfolding before our eyes, we are invariably in the ' cast of characters.' The moment you find yourself in the position of an ' acting character,' it becomes a sort of rôle in your imagination and in your behaviour, with all the consequences that follow from the fact. But that usually escapes your attention at the time."

" Then, in your opinion, I was merely posing when I fought off the bedbugs? I was a ' heroine,' a ' victim playing a part '? "

" Possibly. Provided, however, that you kept your presence of mind, in other words, that you did not entirely lose your human qualities at the moment."

" Did I or did I not, in your opinion? "

" I don't think it was as bad as that. You are too much of an actress, you know too well how to control yourself. Did you flee in terror from your ' enemies '? "

" Suppose I did not. What significance would that have? "

" None, except that you remained true to type. In other words, true to the actress that was in you."

" But I tell you — or must I swear it? — I was beside myself with disgust, I almost fainted."

" Yes, but you didn't. The actress gained control of herself, and within the limits of the theatrical exaggeration which is peculiar to all women, you bravely ' performed ' your part. Now if you had really been maddened by dis-

gust or frightened to such an extent as to lose your presence of mind, or, in short, if you had really lost consciousness of yourself, then you would have ceased to be a human being, master of all the instincts that are commonly found in human beings. You know that theatricality is one of these instincts, and an exceptionally powerful one, too, capable of overcoming even the instinct of self-preservation, as we observe among the natives of Borneo who tattoo their bodies in spite of the excruciating pain and the danger of death, or in the acrobatic feats of Blondin. I say that if you had lost your presence of mind, you would not have been capable of creating a 'theatre for yourself.' But when I say 'every minute of our lives is a theatre,' I have human beings in mind, not animals. The wailing mother in the throes of child-birth, to take the example you have quoted, is not interested in this 'theatre,' because the animal in her has gained the upper hand over the human being. And an exception, my dear lady, only proves the rule."

"Yes, I think my case was an exception to the rule."

"I can't say. I wasn't present at the time. . . ."

"You naughty . . . I like your insolence! But, seriously, don't you ever meet with such exceptions? Recall how you spent your day yesterday. From the time you woke up in the morning until you went to bed at night. I have no doubt you acted as much yesterday as any other day, because I know you to be a pretty good actor. . . . But you will pardon me if I say that I don't believe you were acting *all the time* yesterday. I mean *every minute* of the day. You are too serious a man for that."

"I'm afraid I'll appear even more frivolous than you think I ought to be."

"Don't be afraid of that! Tell me of yesterday. Will you?"

"Yes, to please you."

"No, no, just for the sake of truth itself. What you preach, that 'every minute of our lives is a theatre,' is so preposterous. Just think of it, every minute! If that isn't a mere 'façon de parler,' it's enough to drive one mad. Now, then, 'sans blagues.' Go ahead."

"You've caught me off my guard."

"So much the better."

"Yesterday, you say?"

"Yes."

"Let me recall."

"Go ahead."

"As far as I can remember, nothing unusual happened yesterday. No, nothing unusual."

"Well, then?"

"I spent the day as I always do during the week."

"How?"

"As far as possible, I tried to make a holiday of it. When I got up I went through my exercises. My physician ordered me to do them with nothing on. Now that was sufficient to make me imagine at the time that I was a Spartan, or a Roman gladiator, or just a plain boxer in training."

"You have a very powerful imagination."

"The sight of my taut muscles, the peculiar feeling of freshness one experiences when naked, the postures which

one must assume while exercising, and the very fact that I was undressed, these things taken together always make me think I am performing a part in some ' classical ' play. I don't know how I can make it clear to you."

" Well, and then? "

" After the exercise I took a bath, dressed, shaved, combed my hair, spent some time in ' beautifying myself.' As you know, that is one of the principal requirements of our ' social theatre.' "

" I don't quite follow you. Just what do you mean by ' theatre '? Is hygiene a ' theatre ' too? "

" Yes, but what about a hygiene that transforms you, that is to say, theatricalizes your appearance? The toothbrush, the comb, the razor, the water, the soap, the manicuring set, not to mention the powder, bandaline, curling irons, etc. — all these things change your appearance in accordance with the part imposed upon you by the rules of civilized life. You don't see me appear in public all covered with hair, with long nails, in the primitive manner of the savages, who look half animal, half human. I am theatricalized according to the style demanded by modern society, and that, you will admit, is quite different from the style of the savage."

" Nous y sommes."

" The same may be said of clothes, which sometimes change the contour of the body, like a disguise, and destroy every indication of weight and build, in a word, alter the whole appearance of the body."

" You are very clever."

" I don't think it is necessary for me to dwell on the fact

that clothes change not only our appearance, but, at least to some extent, also our body. Everybody has heard of human feet that have been deformed by shoes, or women mutilated by corsets."

"Yes, go on."

"The rest, it seems to me, is even more easily explained."

"What do you mean?"

"I wager that there is not a single man who does not feel somewhat dignified after putting on his dress-suit, patent-leather shoes, etc. His newly pressed trousers impart an entirely different outline to his legs and at the same time bring about an entirely different self-consciousness. Strange as it may seem, the fact remains that dress influences one's 'part' about as much as the 'part' influences the costume. The army uniform, the judge's chair, the dress-coat, all these things command a certain deportment, which means 'acting.' You will agree with me on this point, it is so obvious. It is more difficult, perhaps, to recognize that the plain, everyday costume, too, imposes a certain 'part.' Yet it is perfectly true. Let a woman put on a nice coquettish hat and she will immediately begin to play the rôle of a good-looking girl."

"I think you're getting away from the subject. You promised to tell me how *you* spent your day yesterday, the day of an actor for whom 'every minute of his life is a theatre.'"

"I do remember my promise. But it seems to me that from what I have already said, it is sufficiently clear that yesterday, like any other day, could be nothing but a day

of continuous 'acting.' Now, if our whole artificial appearance which we are always anxious to preserve and which is the outgrowth of our constantly theatricalizing will-power, compels us to 'play a part,' then the rest is as clear as day, as any day, including yesterday, in which you have done me the honour to take such great interest."

"And that is all you can add in support of your thesis that 'every minute of our life is a theatre'?"

"Oh, not all."

"Go ahead, then, I want to be convinced."

"Well, then, in addition to what I have already said, it may suffice to concentrate for a minute on the essence of our education. I hope you will agree with me that the education we receive from our parents, our governesses, our school-teachers, is nothing more than instruction in a certain 'part' and in how to adapt ourselves to that 'part,' which subsequently becomes our second nature. Upon analysing what I said and did yesterday, I find that I behaved not as a savage, that is to say, not 'naturally,' but as a well-bred European who was brought up in the conventional atmosphere of our culture. I played the 'rôle' of a refined, careful, attentive, sociable, kindly gentleman. So you see that, after all, I was 'acting.' Every minute of my life was a 'theatre,' and a fairly good one, I believe."

"What did you do yesterday?"

"In the morning I read the newspapers with the interest of a stage manager absorbed in the spectacle of the political drama unfolding before him. My imagination helped me to live through all I was reading: it seemed to

me I could visualize the lurid scenes of murder, theft and scandal to which I was treated. I was mentally present, together with the war correspondents, at the 'theatre' of military operations. I enjoyed the last night's plays in the interpretation of our superwise dramatic critics, asking myself where they get the all-disfiguring lenses and glasses before they go to a show. . . . Then I wrote letters to my friends, in other words, I composed monologues. Then I went to the office. On the way, I was preoccupied, as everybody is, with the business of keeping up the appearance of a young man of prepossessing looks with interesting eyes, kind, respectable, businesslike, courteous, and yet unwilling to let anyone take advantage of him. And, of course, at my office, little as I cared to, I had to play the official part assigned to me. Here one acts as best one can. You even get tired of acting your part all the time. After office hours I dined with some friends. This was naturally a continuous display of my elegant manners, education, generosity. (I allowed them to sell me a ticket to some charitable affair.) I tried to impress the young hostess as a worldly, experienced young man; engaged in an insincere conversation with her, just as I am doing now with you, and spent the rest of the evening at a musical show. There's the whole day for you."

"Well, I don't know just what to say. But what makes you think we're engaged in an insincere conversation just now?"

"Well, if we spoke frankly, without observing the dramatic forms of 'social conversation,' then . . ."

"Then what? Why don't you finish?"

"Then, perhaps I would not be talking to you at all."

"What? ? ? "

"Or, if I would, you would hear nothing but abuse."

"Oh! For example? This is getting quite exciting. What would you say? "

"Don't ask me to tell you."

"Yes, I do, I demand it."

"Well, I would say: 'You d—— idiot! Your miserable brain is incapable of comprehending the great truth that every minute of our life is a theatre!' "

"Ha . . . Ha . . . That's putting it very strongly. I think I prefer the insincere conversation."

"I'm of the same opinion."

"In that case I would certainly prefer to have 'every minute of our lives a theatre.' "

"Je ne désire pas mieux."

"Ha . . . Ha! So that's how you talk when you are sincere! "

"I apologize."

"Well, then, status quo ante? "

"Of course! "

"In other words, we are acting again? "

"Yes, we are."

"Like actors? "

"Yes."

"And there is no way out of it? "

"Certainly not."

"Well, perhaps you are right. . . . And yet one mustn't think of it. . . . Otherwise . . ."

"Otherwise what? "

"Otherwise one may go mad, lose one's mind."

"What kind of mind? A d—— fool's mind?"

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, you did say something."

"I did, to myself, 'à part,' to the audience."

"Is that in your 'part' too?"

"No, that is my own interpolation. I apologize."

"What's the matter with your eye? Why are you blushing?"

"I felt embarrassed, and not wishing to betray my embarrassment, I tried to disguise it by rubbing my eye."

"Then I have torn off your mask."

"If you are more observant in future, you will *always* succeed in unmasking everybody — yes, *everybody!*"

Chapter VII

THE EROTIC THEATRE

WE laugh at the silly patch of rouge on the innocent lips of a girl in her 'teens. Or we fail to notice it. Or, after noticing it, we pay no further attention to it. Or, if we do, we fail to grasp its significance. Yet it would be worth our while to give it our thought.

First:

If our world is a cosmic necessity, then the earth too, with its human beings, animals and plants, is a cosmic necessity.

Ergo — the need of perpetuating the human race. Ergo — the female must exercise her powers of attraction to arouse the passions of the male. It is unimportant how she does it; the main thing is that she should do it. It is not mere coquetry, but a higher law expressing itself in the subconscious ego, that impels the girl to theatricalize her appearance sexually, long before she is of marriageable age. She needs training, practice, the assurance of success.

Hence the silly patch of rouge is a necessity of a higher order, and " pulls " not as a trifle but as a weighty body on the cosmic scales.

Second:

By painting her lips with her mother's pencil the girl performs a salutary act of transformation which serves as

a consolation in the tragedy of disillusionment with the world. And not only that. This patch of rouge seems to speak to us for the girl: " You thought me a plain, obedient girl. But I am not. I criticize nature and I am trying to improve upon it. She did not think I needed bright red lips, or perhaps she could not make them sufficiently bright and red. Never mind, I can fix it. I refuse to regard either this world as it has been forced upon me, or my own self, as something that mustn't be changed. I transform myself! I make myself perfect! I dare! I have substituted the individuality that nature gave me with an individuality that I have created myself! With this red patch on my lips I am a different person, and this different person is the product of my own brain, obedient to my will! "

How many girls would fail to see their wedding day were it not for these silly red patches with which they tried to adorn their lips while they were in their 'teens!

Indeed, no one has hitherto tried to investigate in a serious and thorough manner the " erotic theatre."

It cannot be denied that man's sexual instinct often uses theatricality both as a stimulant and as a *conditio sine qua non* for its satisfaction. A long series of facts that might confirm this statement of mine can be found in scientific works dealing with this subject and, especially, in the " scandalous records " of the daily press.

A whole book might be devoted to the description of the " theatrical garments " of sexual life, to the investigation of " erotic mise-en-scènes," to the analysis of the sexual

theatricality in various stages of man's cultural development, etc.

To begin with, analyse the "courting" of a woman by a man, and you will come to the conclusion that it is always the performance of an elaborate *comedy* in which she *impersonates* one "ideal" and he — another one. The convincing and realistic acting continues until the coveted aim has been attained. After this has been done, deceitful theatrical masks which were imposed upon the players by nature may be torn off or may assume any expression without endangering the perpetration of the human race; nature cares no longer.

This will throw a new light on the words of Schopenhauer, who maintained that "after having done his great duty a lover feels *deceived*," as well as on Plato's assertion that "there is nothing more *deceitful* than carnal desire."

It is an old truth that a lover always "idealizes" his beloved. He transforms her in his imagination into a Venus, however plain she may be — in reality. His theatrical imagination straightens out her defects and adorns her with charms which she has never possessed, so that, instead of seeing her as she is, he sees a goddess which he himself has created. And when this vision is dispelled by the satisfaction of his desire, the unconscious self-deception often gives place to the conscious one: what does he not imagine in order to madden his passion again! It would be vain to deny that the commonplace routine of love is not unfrequently revived in such manner.

The art of theatrical deceit in erotic purposes has been

raised in many countries to the level of a real art. A Japanese "geisha" is an artist not inferior in technique to the artists we see on the stage. The ancient world with its Corinthian hetaerae also knew the "art of love" (*ars amandi*). The same applies to the art of the Oriental almeyas and even to the charms of the Parisian "priestesses of love."

That this is a very ancient, an almost prehistoric art may be proved by the fact that it has reached a certain stage of development even among the savage New Zealanders. Here are, for instance, the words of a song which is being sung by these savages during the tattooing of girls who have reached the age of maturity:

"Lie down, my daughter," the mothers sing, "in order that I may embellish you and tattoo your chin. Strangers whose house you will enter will not say: 'Where does this ugly girl come from?' Lie down, my daughter, I will paint your body and tattoo your chin so as to make you a beauty. When you appear at a festivity they won't ask: 'Where does this red-lipped girl come from?' We will make you attractive, we will tattoo you in order that slaves may not say: 'Where does this red-chinned girl come from?' We are beautifying you — may Hi-ne-ta-iwa-iwa, the spirit, be with us! We are tattooing you — may Raugi send the spirit of earth into the deep seas, into the raging waves!"

It may be added that a similar "chorus of passions" resounds in the heart of any cocotte who prepares herself in front of a mirror for the "victories" she will win.

In the forties of the past century Hodgekinson observed,

in the depth of Australia, " most repelling dances which reproduced certain indecent movements with all imaginable accuracy." He was " ashamed to look at these obscene spectacles." It goes without saying that the praiseworthy prudery of the honourable Englishman deserves our sincerest respect. Yet did not similar dances exist at his time in Europe?

Indeed, even the old ballet dances cannot be described otherwise than as *theatrically erotic plays*. The placing of hands on the waist line, the rubbing of body against body, the swinging, etc., — all this speaks for itself. As to the modern dances, Tango, Fox-Trot, Charleston and so forth, who could doubt their purely sexual foundation? Do they not reproduce " certain indecent movements " with such accuracy that one may be " ashamed " to look at them? No, we are by far too cultured to let Australians outdo us in the theatricalization of sexual life. In certain things we are far ahead of them. Do not the covers of some of our periodicals compete in a very effective manner with the most alluring " pornographic " pictures? Haven't you watched the faces of those who buy them? Do not some of the costumes worn by our girls rival the best " sextual " tattooing? Are they not outspokenly erotic costumes? Indeed, sometimes nakedness is far more prudish than a cleverly displayed silk stocking or sweater.

I am not in the least inclined to pronounce a " moral " verdict upon these facts. I want neither to " pillory " the " depravity of our age " (each age has been " pilloried " by some of its contemporaries as " the most immoral in the records of history "), nor to extol the " daring " of

the " new " times (it may be presumed that Australians are also devilishly proud of their " daring "). I have quoted these few facts in order to prove that the silly patch of rouge on the lips of the girl in her 'teens is far more significant than it may appear. It is an infinitesimal part of the erotic theatre in which each one of us may be seen and on which volumes might be written.

Chapter VIII

DON QUIXOTE AND ROBINSON CRUSOE

"WHAT is really astonishing," said the priest, "is that you won't recognize him if the conversation turns to some other subject: he talks on everything in a sober, clear and sensible manner. I assure you that, were it not for this ill-fated chivalry, you would call him a highly enlightened and intelligent man."

Such are the concluding words of "Don Quixote's" thirtieth chapter.

"He talks on everything in a sober, clear and sensible manner. . . . A highly enlightened and intelligent man." Who? Don Quixote? What nonsense!

How could "a highly enlightened and intelligent man" let himself be carried away by all sorts of childish foolishnesses? How could he surrender so completely his mind and heart to a mad Chimera?

This could not be understood by the priest.

Nor could it be understood by Cervantes' critics, including the deep-minded Fischer, who interpreted, and still interpret, "Don Quixote" as a bitter satire pillorying chivalry. It is exactly this side of the immortal novel, we are told, that has rendered it so popular with the masses "which detest and despise the obsolete ideals of aristocracy."

What humbug! Do we, the readers and the admirers of Cervantes, ever give thought to the "chivalrous" novels which his book had killed, which disappeared long since from all book-markets and which can neither interest nor harm anyone at the present time? Do we really consider him a great writer for having dealt once upon a time the last blow to these poor novels? Is the "combating of a social evil" (of a very questionable "social evil," at that) such a great exploit in the eyes of the "positivistic" men of the twentieth century? Is our admiration for "Don Quixote" equivalent to an unworthy joy over the passing of chivalry and over the auto-da-fé of the tales of chivalry?

Ah, these "classical" interpretations of classical works!

The fact is that, to quote Heine's saying, a genius's quill is always wiser than the genius himself, for it covers a much wider ground than he means to cover.

Although chivalry became in the epoch of its decline (that is to say, at the dawn of the Renaissance) a synonym of violence and banditry, it survives in our memory as a synonym of honesty and noble-mindedness, while the chivalrous novel of which we hardly know anything appears to us in the alluring light of mystical romanticism. If so, how can we extol Cervantes for deriding the only lofty, sainted and stainless relic bequeathed to us by the dark and cruel Middle Ages?

Perhaps it is true that, working on his imitative, but inimitable, "chivalrous" novel, Cervantes wanted to pillory the chivalrous literature of his time. Yet it isn't for this that we love him. The thing which appeals to us most in

his book is the sincere and enthusiastic protest against the aggressive reality which triumphs over our earthly lives. For it is exactly this protest that shines forth through Don Quixote's " fabulous " exploits.

To be unrealistic in the midst of realities, — doesn't this characteristic apply to saints and angels as much as to Don Quixote?

" At this moment a shepherd sounded his reed pipe five or six times in succession, and this definitely persuaded Don Quixote that he was in a sumptuous castle where his after-dinner rest was being sweetened by the sounds of music. Cod-fish transformed itself into excellent trout, rough black bread into white, wenches waiting on him into noble ladies, while the proprietor of the inn was transformed into the major-domo of the castle. He was now so glad that he decided to become a knight errant, for the results of his first sally were pleasant and satisfactory indeed."

Do you not envy this magical change of decorations that follows upon the sounds of a reed pipe? Or perhaps you would prefer to see the world as Sancho Panza, the priest and other " positivists " see it?

You certainly won't fool Sancho Panza — he is a hard-boiled, shrewd and clear-sighted fellow.

" ' When you approached her, didn't you inhale an intoxicating aroma of the most aristocratic perfumery shop? '

" ' My nose,' answered Sancho, ' felt nothing but the smell of her perspiration, for she was working very hard at that moment.'

" ' You probably had a bad cold,' said the knight, ' or

you felt your own smell. I know what divine odours float around this rose, this proud lily, this vial of amber.'

" To this Sancho retorted: ' It may be true that I felt my own smell, for I am aware of the fact that I sometimes carry it about my person, just as Dulcinea seems to carry it about hers. And this is but natural, for one devil, they say, looks exactly like another.' "

Well, which of the two noses would you like to have, the nose of Don Quixote or that of Sancho Panza? Would you like to see in Aldonza the poetic Dulcinea del Toboso, or would you prefer to deal with her as she is? Which of the two is better? And whose choice is nobler? Were it not for the fact that we are all, to a certain extent, Don Quixotes *quand même,* we would be perhaps unable to find in this cursed world Aldonzas spreading around them nothing but " divine odours "!

It goes without saying that if you are a businesslike Sancho Panza you will never understand why Don Quixote indulges in Don-Quixotism.

" ' As far as I know,' Sancho said to his master, ' the noble knights suffered and did all sorts of foolishnesses because of various tragical occurrences and adversities of fate. But why should you lose your mind? What lady has hurt your feelings? Or what reason have you to suspect Dulcinea del Toboso of any secret affairs with a Christian or a Moor? '

" ' I certainly have none,' answered Don Quixote. ' It would be unworthy of a knight-errant to lose his mind for some solid reason. *The thing that really matters is to lose one's mind for no reason at all!* ' "

B. Aronson

It is in these words that lies the real explanation of Don-Quixotism. And it is expressed in so clear and simple a manner that, it might seem, even Sancho Panza should understand it. To leave these words unnoticed and unappreciated, as Fischer, Émile Chale, Ticknor and many others have done, means to leave unnoticed and unappreciated the very philosophy of Don-Quixotism, its very *raison d'être*, its meaning and essence. Yet it is true that one cannot learn to understand Don Quixote; Don Quixote can be only *felt*, and in order to feel him one must have in one's soul something of Don-Quixotism.

One cannot appreciate the voice of a paradise bird without being oneself something of a paradise bird. In order to understand and love Don Quixote as some of us love him, we must be relatives, though perhaps very remote ones, of this noble gentleman.

Don Quixote is immortal.

Unnamed and undescribed, he lived for thousands of years before Cervantes. And he will live for thousands of years! He will live as long as there exist barbers' brass basins which may be transformed into Mambrino's shields, as long as there are skinny old horses which may become Rosinantes, as long as one meets Aldonzas whose perspirations may be mistaken for "divine perfume." And what a joy, what a happiness it is to realize that I, and you, and he, and she, and all of us are at bottom Don Quixotes! Indeed, that's enough to make one burst with laughter and delight. . . .

What? You are telling me that the clock of history shows the end of the Middle Ages? What do I care? I

will set it a few centuries back, that's all. I will make its hand point to the hour *I* have chosen! And the mystical monodrama in which all depends upon my will and whim will begin.

We repudiate this world. Let it go to the dogs! It is distasteful to us in its miserable nakedness, in its "experimental" and unimaginative matter-of-factness. We do not believe in it, nor does it believe in itself, nor is it our world at all. It is a stranger hostile to us. Why should we care for it?

Following the example of the poet saddling Pegasus, or of the legendary Alexander mounting his Bucephalus, we saddle our proud Rosinante, wrap ourselves into the austere clothes of hermits, look with feverish, excited eyes at the hazy horizon and cross the boundary of La Mancha, of that uninspiring land ruled by realities. Farewell, priest, farewell, barber, old housekeeper and even the dear young niece! When will we see you again?

Where are we going, and what for?

Our proud Rosinante will take us (not without difficulty) to the summit of some wild and rocky mountain overgrown with shrubs where we will "strip ourselves of our clothes," throw our swords and shields on the ground and, giving ourselves encouraging "kicks in the back," perform "a few good salto-mortales in the air."

"Are you going to do these foolishnesses to make people laugh? Is that the idea?" the simple-minded Sancho Panza will ask. To this, each one of us will answer, as behoves a good Don Quixote: "Nothing of the kind. I

will do all this in complete earnestness. . . . My salto-mortales must be perfectly real, not imaginary. I will even need some cotton to bind my scratches."

What reason do we have to behave in so strange a manner?

None. "*The thing that really matters is to lose one's mind for no reason at all!*"

Such is Don-Quixotism's credo, such is the essence of its philosophy.

It makes you laugh?

I am fully aware of the fact that it must seem laughable to all the Sancho Panzas in the world. To believe F. Dostoyevsky, man is a very "funny being." "Everybody knows," he tells us, that "two multiplied by two make four. Yet man often delights in believing that it makes five." "A palace built of crystal," one of Dostoyevsky's heroes philosophizes, "is sheer nonsense, an impossibility. What do I care, however, if, in spite of the logic, such a palace exists in my wishes, or, rather, exists as long as I have wishes?"

To give oneself an encouraging "kick in the back"! Man is a very "funny being," indeed, and Sancho Panza is perfectly justified in laughing himself to tears over his master's escapades. You probably remember how he laughed when, to please Don Quixote, he pretended to torture himself by self-flagellation (it was the trunk of a tree, and not Sancho's fat body, that suffered). Well, it is a good thing for Sancho that he did not live to the days of Dostoyevsky. Learning that "suffering is the only source of consciousness" and that "it is sometimes a great

pleasure to flog oneself, for it opens to man new horizons," poor Sancho would literally die of laughter.

The "theatre for oneself" to which Don Quixote has dared to surrender is the most logical, the most uncompromising and the most complete expression of man's will to the theatre. If you are fascinated by a fairy-tale, you naturally wish to see it materialized; if you remember with delight the golden years of your childhood, you naturally wish to see some of its vivifying gold on the years of your maturity as well; if you believe that the world is concealed from us by a Fata Morgana, by unfathomable incantations of magistery, you will certainly agree with Don Quixote that "all the knight-errant sees around him is a chimera, a strange nonsense; all runs counter to the course it should take." "The thing," Don Quixote says to Sancho, "which you take for a barber's brass basin, is a Mambrino's shield to me, while to someone else it may appear as something entirely different from both a brass basin and a shield."

It goes without saying that Don Quixote is perfectly right when he mistakes the unpoetic utensil for the miraculous and poetic shield! He is right not only as a theatricalizer *pur sang*, but also as a genuine aristocrat, for it is infinitely simpler, cheaper and easier to take a brass basin for a brass basin, a windmill for a windmill, a squad of prisoners for a squad of prisoners, etc., than to transfigure all these things by one's imagination. (If Turner, the great artist, had not been aristocratically short-sighted, he wouldn't have been a great artist.)

A Don Quixote resides in each one of us. It is for this

reason that we love him, as we love our own weaknesses and shortcomings, our own hopes and aspirations, our own flights from reality.

Yet Don Quixote is such a limit of our own Don-Quixotism, such a *reductio ad absurdum* of our own will to the theatre, such an acute form of theatricalization that we instinctively shrink in horror from him. For us, positivistic men of a positivistic age, this "funny being" is a cartoon, a wild caricature, a parody.

A century after the appearance of "Don Quixote" there appeared a book which soon began to rival in popularity Cervantes' famous masterpiece. What was really remarkable about this new "best seller" was that its hero was a new Don Quixote in disguise. It is true that this was a well-domesticated, a tame, a very sober-minded and realistic, a perfectly acceptable Don Quixote. Even high-school teachers of natural history could approve of such a Don Quixote. Yet, that he *was* a Don Quixote there can be no doubt.

I am speaking of Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe."

In Robinson we discover the same "adventure-seeker," the same "eternal wanderer" and the same "knight-errant" as in Don Quixote. In this his early youth does not differ from his old age.

"My father," Robinson tells us, "asked me what reasons, more than mere wandering inclination, I had for leaving his house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and had a prospect of raising my fortune by application and industry, with a life of ease and pleasure."

Many years later, when, after a long series of adventures, he returned to his native country, the same question was asked by his true friend, the widow. For, in spite of wealth and seeming happiness, he was unhappy and dreamed of resuming the adventurous life of his youth. Scenes of fantastic attacks, murders, escapes, etc., obsessed him.

Ah, this is certainly our old, our beloved Don Quixote! The most real, the most fantastic in his thirst for the theatre, Don Quixote. Yet this new knight-errant differs from the old one in that he often looks at himself with a humorous and even sceptical eye; he is very fond of his "theatre for himself," but he can also laugh and ironize over this theatre.

"It would have made a stoic smile to have seen me and my little family sit down to dinner; there was my Majesty, the prince and lord of the whole island; I had the lives of all my subjects at absolute command; I could hang, draw, give life and liberty, and take it away, and no rebels among all my subjects.

"Then, to see how like a king I dined, too, all alone, attended by my servants! Poll, as if he had been my favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me; my dog, which was now grown very old and crazy, and found no species to multiply his kind upon, sat always at my right hand; and two cats, one on one side of the table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a bit from my hand, as a mark of special favour."

How fond is Robinson of this "theatre for oneself"! How dear is his uninhabited island to him! Nothing pre-

vents his imagination from ruling supreme in this little patch of land surrounded by high seas.

" Oh, how I love thee, my happy desert! " he exclaimed on the day when he missed by a hair's breadth the dreaded possibility of losing it.

Indeed, in order to mistake oneself for a king in the primitive miserable surroundings of cave-life, nothing less than Don Quixote's fantasy and imagination were required. It is only thanks to this invaluable gift of the gods that he could see proud courtiers in his parrot, dog, cats, etc.

" ' What! ' exclaimed Don Quixote. ' You really mean to say that this is a country-inn? '

" ' I certainly do,' answered the proprietor. ' It is a country-inn, and a very good one, at that.'

" ' Isn't that funny! ' whispered the knight. ' I was sure it was a castle.' "

Here Don Quixote fails in the most shameful manner in comparison with Robinson, for it is certainly much easier to mistake a country-inn for a castle than to transform by a heroic effort of one's will to the theatre the miserable food of a caveman into a royal meal.

Don Quixote is dreaming all the time. He has fallen asleep once and for ever to the realities of our life. Robinson is asleep and awake at the same time: there is Robinson, a fantastic dreamer and theatricalizer, and Robinson, a sound realist. Which of them vanquishes the other in the last account? Certainly Robinson, the Don Quixote.

"My ill fate," Robinson confesses, "pushed me on with an obstinacy that nothing could resist; and though I had several times loud calls from my reason and my more composed judgment to go home, yet I had no power to do it. I know not what to call this, nor will I urge that it is a secret, overruling decree that hurries us on to be the instruments of our own destruction. . . ."

How could we fail to recognize in this "overruling decree" the categorical imperative of theatricality which prompted Don Quixote to fight the windmills? For both these monomaniacs could neither love nor die without adventuring and theatricalizing.

Is it not characteristic, indeed, that Robinson speaks of his approaching death as a good tourist-playgoer? — "Now, when I am sixty-two, I have preserved my wand which . . . I may need on my last journey — to heaven." This is truly a befitting ending for the adventures of Robinson Crusoe.

Robinson waded through a life full of purely Don-Quixotic exploits and adventures and, wading through it, he all the time preserved a striking resemblance to the "knight of the melancholy image." Both were longing for things unusual, both were tortured by the thirst for adventures, and both abandoned for ever their respective La Manchas of commonplace reality. In their theatrical struggle with life and with adverse elements, both needed assistants; yet neither Sancho Panza nor Friday prevented them from spending their time in highly aristocratic society, that is to say, in complete solitude.

Don Quixote and Robinson Crusoe — these two names

will always accompany mankind as its eternal companions shedding light on its ineradicable will to the theatre.

Not long before his death Cervantes wrote: "I will leave this world carrying on my shoulders the gravestone which should be placed over the tomb of my shattered hopes. . . . My theatre is neglected by all." But the shadow of the genius may rest in peace. It is true that Lope de Vega's theatre had displaced Cervantes' theatre from the official stage. Yet in his "Don Quixote" Cervantes gave to the world such a wonderful and unique sample of the "theatre for oneself" that the "theatre for others" which was bequeathed to us by the great Lope is now justly forgotten by many.

Indeed, what can be sweeter and loftier in our disgracefully disreputable age than the lot of Don Quixote? And what is better than to be a Robinson of the theatre? In the years when both the public theatre and the theatre in life are on the decline, the only thing that remains for a real aristocrat of the theatre is to indulge in *performances organized by oneself — for oneself*. If, packed to capacity with democratic crowds, the public theatre is dying, *the "for oneself" theatre must live and will live!*

Chapter IX

THE STAGE MANAGEMENT OF LIFE

I WILL begin anaphorically:

When I enter a nursery and see chairs transformed into horses, the quilt changed into the top of a tent, the table turned into an impregnable fortress, and the red belt into a murderer's cap;

When I am on Broadway and behold hundreds of softly rolling cars and thousands of straw-hatted, shaven-faced and uniformly dressed men obey with a soldier-like discipline the movements of a traffic-cop;

When I am in a business office filled with the monotonous rustling of paper, with the noise of typewriters and adding machines and with an uninterrupted stream of business-like human voices;

When I am in a dance-hall and observe the endless procession of bobbed-haired, short-skirted, cute and homely girls melting away in the arms of their boy friends to the sounds of a shriekingly lascivious jazz-band;

When, visiting a prison, I observe the mathematical, machine-like precision in the distribution of working hours, hours for washing, praying and eating, behold long rows of dejected men wearing clothes of identically similar cut and colour, and note the strict control of earthly goods allowed to them, from the cubic volume of air to the number of threads in bath-towels;

When I visit a cemetery and behold even there a perfect order in the line-up of monuments, in the arrangement of graves under these monuments and in the position of dead bodies in these graves; —

— I cannot help feeling that everything proceeds in this world, from infancy to death, in strict obedience to the dictates of an invisible "stage manager" whose word means in the orderly course of our life-comedies infinitely more than we can imagine (which is, of course, but natural, for a conceited player preoccupied with his own dear self never notices the efforts of the all-controlling stage manager).

"Stage management" means, as we understand it, the reduction of all things seen on the stage to a common denominator, to a sort of standard style, standard temperament, standard taste, standard rhythm. It fuses the play, the actors participating in it, the stage-setting illustrating it, and lots of other variegated things connected with it, into a harmonious theatrical whole. It is that which crowns months of meticulous analysis with the coveted synthesis, which makes the scenic Chaos crystallize into Logos.

The life of each city, of each country, of each nation is submitted to such a stage management. And walking in the streets, sitting in the restaurants, visiting the boulevards and the stores of Paris or New York or any other place in the world, I always analyse the tastes and the abilities of their collective stage managers — the public — who mould the theatrical material obedient to them in accordance with their scenic schemes and designs. They decree the use of such and such costumes, prescribe the arrangement of

various objects, determine the general character and the scenery of the stage where their daily plays are enacted. I see pedestrians, street-cleaners, motormen, constables, and observe the collective " mask " of the given street or section of the city. Does the stage manager know his business? Are the ensemble scenes well played? Are the participants in these scenes well trained? And how about the artist who designed the decorations? And I praise or blame the stage manager, pronouncing my verdict on the basis of a careful theatrical investigation of his production.

That such stage management plays an enormous rôle in our lives may be easily understood by all who have studied history. Each epoch has its own theatrical characteristics, its own wardrobe and scenery, its own " mask." Indeed, to study history and not to perceive in it the all-pervading influence of stage management means not to see the forest for the trees.

Not to diffuse our efforts in search of proofs, let us take the example of Spain in the seventeenth century, when she was at the height of her power and glory. She set at that epoch an exceptionally high example of historic stage management: Inquisition-tribunal with masked judges and hellish stage-craft of torture, huge autos-da-fé, where executioner and martyr rivalled each other in the strict adherence to their parts, the brilliance of sinister costumes, — all was harmonized and stylicized. There was the duelling ritual which enabled masters of fencing to glory in the part of gallant gentlemen who, even dying from wounds, never failed to drop some complimentary remark about their beloved ones. The vulgar butchery was trans-

B. Aronson

formed there into the refined spectacle of the bull-fight, and the affected speech of Gongora with its tempting unnaturalness supplanted the natural idiom of the nation.

Add to this, endless and purely operatic processions of various kinds, religious, royal, military, criminal ("walking" the criminals through the streets), wedding and carnival (the procession of Tarask). The theatrical "filling" penetrated into every part of the "pie of life" baked by the ecclesiastics with thin, acrid oil, and it became impossible to distinguish the "filling" from the "crust," the religious form of a ceremony from its theatrical contents. The best actors gave up the stage and entered the monasteries, while the most ascetic monks left their cells and entered the actors' guilds. The greatest playwrights of the seventeenth century were the monks Lope de Vega, Carplo and Calderon, while the most sainted nun (at whose death, legend has it, the church-bells began of themselves to toll her passing) was the actress Baltasara. Is it possible that renunciation of the world by a monk is also dictated to him by the instinct of transformation, which is nothing but theatricality in disguise? The history of the ultra-theatrical Spain furnished sufficient ground for such an assumption.

It would be, however, a mistake to think that Spain set the best imaginable example of stage management in life, for it was left far behind by the France of the eighteenth century. Here the rivalry between the theatrical stylishness of life, on the one hand, and of the stage, on the other, was so keen that one could not always tell which of the two contained the lesser degree of reality. Both in life and on

the stage, studied rhetorical speech reigned supreme. Both were characterized by a supreme refinement of manners, smiles and gestures. In both, costumes were just as decorative as houses, palaces and gardens built and planted for "show." There was an excessive use of powder, rouge, beauty spots, monocles; and men's countenances, skilfully transformed into elaborate works of art, were allowed to preserve little, if anything, of their natural features. There were impossible wigs which entirely distorted the proportions of the head as compared with the body, and the still more impossible "courtoisies" which entirely concealed man's real self behind elegant bows, reverences, inclinations of the head, etc.

It is not for nothing that the portraits by Fragonard were mostly of actors. "They were," says R. Mouter, "the idols of an epoch when people no longer lived, no longer behaved naturally, but performed and watched others perform."

Then came a reaction, or, rather, that which seemed to be a reaction. The first to "come to" on the stage of life was Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the first to do so on the theatrical stage was Talma. Both of them had been valets in their youth, and both of them conceived the idea of bringing back to naturalness the luxuriously unnatural life. This, however, did not much affect the general stage management. Rousseau's philippics against the culture of the eighteenth century, and Talma's "classical" (sometimes even nude) figure on the stage, simply lent a new shade to the old styles and harmonies of life.

A long series of revolutions was required in order to

make men of the " old régime " understand the theatrical artificiality of the hierarchy of life. The first revolution merely changed the mise-en-scène and redistributed the parts, after reducing them to one common theatrical denominator by making " all men equal." After a purely theatrical state of equality had been thus established, the first thing to do was to invent a new costume. The painter David designed a costume of the " free citizen," the actor Talma made a first trial of it on the stage, and the people approved and adopted it. The perukes were burned, the hair was trimmed short on the neck and, as a sign of greeting, people exchanged brief, convulsive nods, imitating the last agonies of those who perished on the guillotine.

The passion for theatricality manifested itself even in the treatment which was accorded to the bodies of decapitated victims. They were artistically arranged in various postures, as if they were conversing or making love in a pathetic or a pornographic manner. People played with them, sang to them, danced in front of them, laughed at them, and greatly amused themselves with the absurd appearance of these clumsy actors who performed so poorly their funny parts. Witnessing executions was so much in vogue among women (Grand Guignol!) that they wore ear-rings in the shape of diminutive guillotines, made of steel, with little rubies representing drops of blood.

In a word, the Great Revolution was not only political, but also theatrical, not only a sudden change of government, but also a complete change in the general stage management of life. Revolutionary masses obeyed only

those who possessed the artistic temperament and who could teach them to perform their new rôles. Incorrigible actors, unhappy without a good stage director, they soon found one in the person of Napoleon, who undertook, and not without success, even to teach the great Talma. The *coup d'état,* as well as the *coup de théâtre,* which could not be accomplished by the stupid and incompetent Robespierre, was successfully accomplished by Napoleon, the most amazing *régisseur* of all times and all histories.

Here, indeed, was an actor from whom our theatrical "geniuses" might learn a great deal: an actor who dared to regard the world as a stage for his début; who transformed the thrones of kings into boards for his acting, the flames devouring Moscow into a spotlight throwing his tragic part into relief, the cannon of all nations into a solemn music accompanying his astounding rise to power. Yes, he knew but too well how effective at the "theatre" of war was Caesar's phrase, "*Jacta alea est,*" Cato's "*Delenda Carthago,*" etc. He realized that even the most important event could be easily forgotten by the masses, while such words as "Var, Var, give me back my legions," insignificant and trivial in themselves, would be memorized by all, would be theatrically immortal. Valuing, as a genuine actor, the "best passages" of his rôle, he worked real miracles by the use of such phrases as "forty centuries look down upon you from the tops of the pyramids." It is not for nothing that, even while perishing, the Old Guard remained true to their chief's theatrical instructions; their famous battle-cry, "The Old Guard dies but never sur-

renders," turned the ignominious Waterloo into one of the most glorious pages of world history.

The great actor knew how to transform into an impressively important pose even such a trifle as his old-fashioned, conventional way of carrying himself, with arms folded on the chest. Here was a man with a real mania for transformation, with a mania for theatrical effects at any cost! A stage director who imposed theatrical parts not only on simple mortals, but on kings and nations as well. A playwright who chose the "Empire style" for his plays and made young and old become "crazy" about it! A producer who sacrificed millions of lives in his theatrical venture, but whose sins were willingly absolved by mankind, for great and glorious indeed were his "productions" and unforgettable the memory of his unsurpassed acting on the boards of the "World Theatre." Truly, his laurel crown of an Emperor was at the same time a well-deserved wreath of a Great Actor.

"*Mais il était du monde, où les plus belles choses ont le pire destin.*" After his passing, the winds of positivism dispelled the alluring vapours of his epoch. When you and I were born, dandyism and foolishness were already synonyms, the plastic art of posing was considered ridiculous, the cultivation of the phrase, reprehensible.

We are living at a time when the art of stage management has sunk desperately low. Rationalism, utilitarianism, science, industry, the satisfaction of the primitive needs of men with blistered hands and dirty nails, — such are the questions that interest us most.

We were born in the dusk. . . .

We came into this world burdened with worries about our "daily bread," "justice" and other usefully and boresomely vegetarian things, but without a single thought to the "circenses" of life which are, perhaps, equally important to the welfare of men, for our needs are not limited to so many loaves of bread per day.

We are trying to drive theatricality not only from our life, but even from our theatres. And for this absurd desire of ours we are punished with all severity of justice. Theatricality is an instinct, and, in spite of all attempts, we cannot get rid of it. Yet, for the simple reason that we do not cultivate it, we are cursed with a superlatively bad and tasteless form of theatricality. We are actors just the same; yet, instead of being good actors we are rotten actors, instead of producing good plays we produce trash, instead of having good stage managers we submit to the absurd orders of exceedingly dull ones. We play the "realists," the "radical intellectuals," the "shrewd business-men," the "good sports," the "old toppers," and what not. What a truly proletarian misery of taste! We have given up the styles, the traditions and the customs of past centuries, but we have not replaced them with new ones, and we live in the atmosphere of complete stylelessness. The stamp of the ten-cent store and chewing-gum stage management lies literally on everything around us.

A living-room set, a table in front of it, a standing lamp and an album with photographs. The guest enters with his wife. The hostess seats herself on the davenport and offers a seat next to herself to the lady visitor. The host

sits down in the chair to the right, and the other man in the chair to the left. And the manner in which they are going to conduct their insipid conversation, and the manner in which they will exchange all these "Isn't-that-wonderfuls" and "Don't-you-like-its," and the manner in which the visitor will ask permission to smoke and the hostess will say: "Oh, certainly," and the host will light a match and move the ash tray over to the guest; and the manner in which the chambermaid will bring in tea and cookies, and the lady guest will refuse a second cup; and the intonation when the visitor is asked whether she "takes her tea with cream"; and the fact that the davenport is always flanked by two chairs, with always the same table in front of it and the inevitable standing lamp beside it — all this produces the same melancholy feeling as the sight of a machine for making tallow candles, whose owner has died without shutting up the factory. There is electricity everywhere, but the tallow flows and flows and the machine works on without stopping, rusty, creaking, cumbersome, unwieldy and absolutely useless to anyone.

If I had the time I would write a play about a young man (somewhat absent-minded and short-sighted) who comes to a Sunday five o'clock tea at the home of one of his numerous friends. He is introduced to the other guests. He drinks tea, converses on the topics of the day, including the theatre, the races, etc. He stays for more than half an hour. The hostess scolds him for not having attended their last amateur performances. ("We thought you were such a melomaniac!") She asks him when he last danced with her daughter. She regrets that her daughter is not

at home. The young man wipes his spectacles, looks with fixed attention at the hostess, casts a glance around and suddenly rises. It seems to him that he is in the wrong house. But, strangely enough, the house of the people whom he thought he was visiting has exactly the same vestibule, the same door to the right, the same parlour, the same living room, the same door to the left. The furniture, too, is the same as here. There are just as many windows, the same pictures, the same rugs and portières. Even the hostess is the same, with exactly the same manners, dressed like the one he is now facing, and displaying an interest in exactly the same things, to judge by her questions. There are the same kindly visitors belonging to the same class and holding the same opinions on football games, politics, etc. Yes, he is in the wrong house, probably next door to the one he meant to visit. Or perhaps he has entered the second-floor apartment instead of entering the third-floor one? But how could he avoid this mistake if everything is so deucedly alike in this city, from the houses to their furnishings and inhabitants? If he is to blame, then the hostess is also to blame, as well as her relatives, friends and all those who received him so kindly and treated him like an intimate friend for a good half-hour! . . .

That would make an excellent play, funny, biting and true.

A theatrically discriminating person finds it impossible to visit people nowadays. He can no longer endure the frightful similarity of all the domestic "theatres for oneself." That is why he longs to go abroad, to the squalid

Orient, anywhere; he simply wants to see different people about him.

> " Rather I choose laboriously to bear
> A weight of woes, and breathe the vital air,
> A slave to some poor hind that toils for bread,
> Than reign the sceptred monarch of the dead."

Thus spoke Achilles to Odysseus, who descended into the realm of Pluto. And I truly sympathize with him, because I cannot conceive anything more gloomy than Pluto's " stage management." Wherever he rules, there is no theatre in the real sense of the word, but only a bad parody of it, a panopticon which Orpheus alone can revive, when he gives voice to his consuming passion for his lost stage-partner, Eurydice.

If our life is a theatre, why should we not make a really good theatre out of it? We call ourselves individualists, but where are our stage-managing individualities?

In the Summer of 1914 I was in Vienna and visited the Prater, where, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Austria's liberation from Napoleon's rule, the " old Wien " was reconstructed. Against the background of shady chestnut and lime-trees one could admire real mansions of burghers, old inns, theatres, shops, bars. . . . A genuine Hanswurst was performed on the open market-stage, while streets were filled with wandering singers and musicians, soldiers and officers wearing the uniforms of the first years of the nineteenth century, and various other types of that epoch, including, by the way, the half-

legendary students, the romanticist "Burschen" in the unsurpassed splendour of their picturesque attire! They smoked from their long Stinktopfs, drank wine and sang with gay and spirited voices: "Wir trinken nur Wein und lieben nur Weib." I could not help remembering the play "Old Heidelberg," as well as the May-day parades of student corporations at Dorpat which I had seen in the early days of my childhood when, chaperoned by my governess, I walked in the mediaeval Domberg of that city. Remembering all this now, in the Prater, I thought, Lord, how much more interesting, beautiful and resourceful had been the stage management of life but a few decades before! What artistry, originality and wealth of imagination did this stage management display in the staging of its productions! Is our generation really so old, so miserably worn out and impotent? Is there really no hope for the transfiguration of our life by a resourceful and daring stage management? Is it possible that we should be so "realistic," tame and lifeless as to accept without protest these dull and tasteless decorations of ours, these rusty and dusty rafters and skeletons? Is a radical reform of the theatrical side of life impossible?

Chapter X

CRIME AS A BY-PRODUCT OF THE THEATRE

I FULLY realize that the psychological origins of crime is a subject too serious and important to be handled "paradoxically" and "entertainingly." Criminology has always attracted my most serious attention, and writing this chapter I am anything but "paradoxical" or light-minded.

It has always seemed to me that our usual conception of crime is astonishingly superficial, not to say more.

It should be understood first of all that, if we admit that everything abides in this world by the law of causes and effects, that our every word and action is preordained (and it is only on this ground of philosophic predeterminism that a thinker feels safe), our very conception of crime will evaporate, go up into smoke. The "terrible" word alone will remain.

Why, let me ask you, is it asserted that "the criminal is guilty before the law," but not vice versa, *i.e.*, that "the law is guilty before the criminal"? Indeed, is the law not an unjustifiable restriction imposed on the "criminal's" will, not a threat of violent intrusion upon one's privacy, not a calumnious qualification of a deed preordained by Nature?

The only thing my mind can discern in each given case of a "crime" is a deplorable conflict between two irrecon-

cilable conceptions of good and evil, no more. Indeed, should I qualify an infringement upon accepted laws as a " crime " merely because the lawmaker has the police at his disposal?

Just analyse with all seriousness the following situation: Man's will is not free, that is to say, each man placed in exactly the same surroundings as the criminal, possessing exactly the same hereditary inclinations as he, acting under the influence of identically similar motives, etc., etc., would *inavertibly* commit the same " crime " against our human laws; now, suppose that, by some miraculous effort of his will-power (let us admit for a minute that such an effort would be possible!), he should abstain from committing it; well, wouldn't this abstention of his be a *still greater crime* than the one he was bound to commit? Wouldn't it be a crime against the unfathomable *laws of Nature,* against the decrees of Providence which have preordained with ineluctable imperativeness all his acts and deeds?

In other words, each criminal might say that he has chosen the smaller of the two evils. This, of course, would not compel the judge to change his verdict, yet it would be perfectly true.

Let us now analyse the problem from a diametrically opposed viewpoint: we will presume that, instead of being predetermined, man's will is absolutely free.

In his " Notes from the Underground " F. Dostoyevsky asks:

" Why do you assume that man's criminal will *needs to be ' reformed '?* How do you know that such a ' reform '

will be of benefit to him? And, if one be permitted to speak one's mind, what makes you believe that not to go against one's normal, primitive, 'mathematical' interests is always of benefit to man? Why do you think that is a 'law of mankind'? Is it not a mere assumption on your part? Even granting that it is 'a law of logic,' what is there to prove that it is a 'law of mankind' as well? "

Yes, to act in one's "normal, primitive interests" is a "law of logic," but not of "mankind," because the thirst for the impossible, for the fantastical and for the unattainable will never cease to prompt men far beyond the bounds of "logic" and of "common sense."

It is exactly in man's blind and illogical desire to go "against one's normal, primitive, 'mathematical' interests" that is rooted "the will to the theatre," the will which is always, in a sense, *criminal*, for the delights with which it tempts us lie in the joyful and happy *transgression* of laws, — "logical," "natural" and other. Schopenhauer is certainly not right when he asserts that "logic can be of no practical use to man." Of "no practical use"? How is that? Is a circus clown holding a circle in the way of a young rider-acrobat also "of no practical use" to her? He creates an obstacle in her way; but is it not in the masterful overcoming of artificial obstacles that lies the supreme joy of acrobatics? And if our logic plays the rôle of such a clown raising obstacles on the arena of life to our playful spirit, how can we deny that it is of the greatest "practical use" to us?

The transgression of boundaries traced around us by

someone's, or something's, will is of that "practical use" to us that it carries us into a new world, into new luring and alluring regions. No one is going to put spokes into the wheels of our imagination any longer! Here we are free, all restrictions fall and disappear, the sign "Strictly Prohibited . . ." vanishes! Our transfiguring ego reigns here supreme. Only five minutes ago it was a slave; now it is a "five-minutes-to-God." It transforms by its royal decrees "nothing" into "everything," and into a very wonderful "everything" at that, for it is *its own* "everything," abiding by its own laws, by its own Logos.

"The will to the theatre" and "the will to the crime," — are these two things not equivalent? Are they not based on the same anarchical foundations?

"Satisfy all the desires of a man," the voice from Dostoyevsky's "Underground" tells us, "bestow upon him all sorts of prosperity, place him in such economic conditions that he needn't do anything except eat candies and thank God. Drown him in happiness so that only bubbles would appear on the surface of his care-free existence. Yet, believe me, even then he won't stay quiet. Out of sheer ungratefulness or senseless troublesomeness he will play some dirty trick on destiny. He will risk and jeopardize everything, even the candies, for the ephemeral pleasure of adding to all this prosperity some silly imaginative flourish *of his own.*"

You see that even Dostoyevsky, this most untheatrical and anti-theatrical of writers, supports with a very weighty argument my conception of the "theatre for oneself."

Indeed, how could it be denied that the theatre (any theatre, I mean to say) is unavoidably a "transgression," an "infringement" upon some laws, that is to say, a "crime"?

Does not the very essence of the theatre lie in the violation of norms set by nature, by the State, by the public?

Yes, the theatre is, in the philosophic sense of the word, a crime. If it were not, it would lose all its charm, all its irresistible attractiveness, its *raison d'être*.

Here it must be added that the theatre is sometimes "criminal" in its methods not only in this — philosophic — sense, but also in a strictly juridical sense. Lies, simulation, deceit, the use of false names ("stage names"), lascivious embraces and kisses before the eyes of the public ("Here, Miss So and So," the stage manager says at the rehearsal, "you must be a living temptation: move your bosoms, show your legs as high as possible, be full of desire and passion!"), etc., etc. Add to this the "sympathetic and attractive" villains whom we often see on the stage and who often play the rôle of real psychological instigators of a crime. Remember, for instance, how many youths became once upon a time the imitators of Schiller's "Robbers"!

But we needn't even go as far as that. Take the contemporary "movies" with their detective films, with pictures of fight, murder and kidnapping, with tasteless spectacles of fabulous wealth and luxury, with fantastic adventures leading to the acquisition of such wealth and luxury, etc. What influence can such a "theatre" have on spectators, especially on youthful ones? Indeed, it is

not through mere coincidence that crimes are more than often highly theatrical and that the theatre — also more than often — uses crime as one of its favourite subjects. That there is a strange psychological kinship between the theatre and crime one can hardly deny.

Do not tell me, please, that vices and crimes are shown on the stage with the vegetarian and highly moral purpose of proving that they are always punished and that virtue invariably triumphs. Just weigh on the proper scale the fact that the more "criminal" is a show in its methods, the greater are the returns of the theatre, and you will admit that you are not right. What can attract the attention of the public (and extract the money from the purses) better than a good Grand Guignol, a farce with undressing, a score of "perfect" bare legs on the stage or a good salacious song? Believe me, the Church, struggling for centuries against the theatre, knew very well what a "criminal" enemy it was combating! Indeed, it is but logical that, until comparatively recent times, actors, like criminals, could not be buried in the Christian cemeteries of a great many European countries.

In my conception of the theatre as a crime I am not at all so lonely as the reader might think.

Thus, Herman Bar expresses in his novel, "The Theatre," ideas which are closely akin to mine. "As a consequence of the collision of wild passions," he says, "the theatre becomes again an arena of all evil instincts, a hothouse of hideous vices, a real temple of Satan, while the actor's profession transforms itself into a mask of impious ambitions. Looking at these people, one doesn't know

who they are at bottom, dreamers, impudent speculators or worshippers of Satan." The director of the city theatre of Vienna who figures in this novel, says: "I am astonished that decent people should not refuse to shake hands with me; they apparently do not know what a theatre is like. Truly, to one who is familiar with the life of the theatre a criminal is less objectionable than an actor. It is a great mistake that actors should be permitted to rub shoulders freely with the rest of men. In the daytime they should be locked in cages, or, at least, they should walk around with special signs hung on their necks, so that everybody may know them at the first glance."

In comparison with this director of the theatre the great Plato was both much more human and far more logical: he maintained that players should be crowned with laurel-wreaths and . . . deported from his "ideal State." The people, Plato believed, acquired in the theatre the dangerous habit of mistaking the illusion for the reality; feeding thus on lies and empty phantoms they lost the main virtues of citizens — honesty and dependability. An ultra-developed imagination and an unrestrained thirst for satyricizing, the great philosopher asserted, turned into a joke the sacred foundations of the State, profaned the mainstays of all human society, such as marriage, the family, the community, etc., and prompted men to cover with mud the worthiest of citizens, like, for instance, Socrates.

It is amusing to note that J. J. Rousseau held similar views: when Geneva, his native republic, had closed all theatres within its territory, he wrote to d'Alembert that

he approved whole-heartedly of this measure, for the theatre was, in his opinion, "the school of immorality, luxury and vanity."

Indeed, the theatre is unavoidably all permeated with lies, for lies are the only medium for the picturization of things non-existing as really existing. Do you remember, by the way, what the ethically rigoristic Kant said of the lie? He defined it as "the non-fulfilment of one's greatest duty to oneself," that is to say, as the *heaviest imaginable crime*.

Yes, the theatre is always a crime, but, in its best forms, it is such a fascinating, such an alluring, harmless, inoffensive and sublimating crime that, as long as there is life on our planet, men, and even animals, will never cease to perpetrate it.

The magical key of "the theatre for oneself" enables us to unlock the secret door of Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment." For it is through "the theatre for oneself" that the daring Raskolnikov rose infinitely higher than Napoleon himself.

Napoleon sought glory, immortality in history and fame of the greatest world-actor. The only thing Raskolnikov needed was the assertion of his own ego, the recognition by himself of his own strength and daring. And he achieved it by disobeying freely and disinterestedly the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Yet, having achieved it, he rose still higher by realizing the futility of his daring and of his greatness.

It is "the theatre for oneself," too, that provides us with the strongest critical argument against Raskolnikov.

If Raskolnikov had been a better "actor for himself" he would not have needed actually to kill the poor old woman in order to arrive at his final — philosophically Christian — conclusion. He might have "staged" the whole crime in his imagination.

Chapter XI

THEATROTHERAPY

JUST a few examples:

You're not well. You feel blue. Your face is sallow, you have a bitter taste in your mouth, you get up in the morning nervous and tired.

"Fatigue," says the doctor. "You must get a good rest. A nice long trip would do you good. Go to Italy, or Spain, or to Algeria. The change of climate and of atmosphere will cure you."

You follow his advice. You start out on a trip, and, true enough, a month or six weeks later the "change" has put new life into you, there is colour in your cheeks, you sleep well, you have forgotten all your troubles. You are "cured."

Why is it so? What is the secret of the "change" the doctor recommended?

The reason is that you were induced to leave the place where you had so adapted yourself to things occupying your attention that you could no longer maintain a contemplative attitude towards them. You had ceased to regard your surroundings as a show which is interesting in itself, regardless of the part you play in it. You left all that and became a theatrical spectator. You are in Italy, for example, and, whether you like that country or not,

its picturesque squares, houses, streets, monuments, ruins, etc., arrest your attention and fill your mind with new impressions. You observe a succession of new stage settings thrilling you with novelty and awakening your instinct of transformation which hitherto lay dormant. Do not all these new men who are dressed differently, who speak differently, gesticulate differently and live differently force themselves upon your attention as a purely theatrical phenomenon?

It is the magic of the theatre, and not merely the air, or the climate, or the rest from work, that changes you beyond recognition.

It is the magic of the theatre, and nothing else, that gives you a new consciousness, a new scale of feelings, a new interest in life and a new will to live. And in this will to live, as we know, lies the secret of our victory over many bodily ills.

Ask a doctor what a tremendous part the will to live plays in a consumptive patient's struggle against approaching death.

Of course, when it is a question of a fractured leg or catarrh of the kidneys, theatrotherapy is of as little use as hydrotherapy, heliotherapy, electrotherapy, radiotherapy or any other kind of therapy.

Here is, for example, the case of soldiers at the front who, in spite of all privations, keep in excellent health. Is this not a proof of the salutary character of theatrotherapy as applied to masses? Shells burst all round, and it is cold, damp and dreary in the trenches. Their life is sweetened by no trace of home comforts. Yet a youth who

was pale and sickly at home develops overnight at the front into a healthful and strong man. Instead of killing him, the adversities of war conditions have cured him. You and I know of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of such instances.

The "theatre of military operations," like any other kind of theatre, awakens in us the "will to live," makes us undergo a thorough self-transformation. It is exactly in this self-transformation that lies the secret of the truly vivifying influence of the theatre, of its curative power.

If the theatre in its ordinary form is found ineffective, people resort to theatrical "doping." The value of the theatre as a stimulant is shown in the instance of Japanese army officers who, to instil new courage into their exhausted troops, put on the armour of the ancient Samurai and thus led them into battle. This was done, for example, during the Russo-Japanese war, and it will be hardly an exaggeration to say that the last assault on Port Arthur was successful chiefly because of such theatrotherapeutical masquerade.

We need not dwell, however, on comparatively rare cases where powerful stimulants must be applied. I have mentioned the example of the Japanese army merely to show that theatrotherapy may be effective even in such cases. Let us turn to normal theatrotherapeutical methods and cures.

Whenever Count Leo Tolstoy was sick, he used autosuggestion as a remedy and invariably attained beneficial results. His method of mentally overcoming disease was nothing but a form of self-transformation by imagining himself well and acting accordingly. Being a great artist

and a great dramatist, Tolstoy, when he was ill, had no difficulty in playing the part of a person who was well. And he played it as skilfully as a professional actor suddenly taken ill during the performance who goes on with his part as though nothing had happened and overcomes his ailment by the transfigurative energy of the rôle which he enacts.

The reader sees, of course, that this method of mine is closely akin to the theories of auto-suggestion, to the ideas expounded in Prentice Millford's "At the Dawn of Immortality," to the teachings of Dr. Coué, etc. Here is a quotation from Millford's book:

"Help yourself get well. Imagine yourself playing tennis or golf, etc. . . . Every imagined representation is an invisible reality. The longer we cling to this representation, and the more intense it is, the more fully will it accord with the forms of reality perceived by our senses."

Do not these lines speak of "theatrotherapy"? Is the method described in them not theatrical par excellence? "Play a rôle well, and you will live up to it" — such is the quintessence of this passage and the corner-stone of the auto-suggestive system.

The theatre "cures" an actor skilful in the art of self-transformation. When I was a stage director I myself had frequent occasion to observe how an actor who seemed sick and "all in" half an hour before the performance would become transformed as soon as he would begin to play his part, and would feel completely "cured" after the performance.

Is it not for this reason that actors and actresses preserve

their youthful appearance and cheerfulness longer than other people?

The theatre cures the actors. It also cures the audience. The great Aristotle, in his doctrine of "Catharsis," had stressed the curative value of a well-staged tragedy. As far as the present author's knowledge goes, nothing in the teachings of Aristotle has given rise to as many contradictory interpretations as the doctrine of Catharsis. Yet the basic principle of this doctrine seems to be clear: looking at the development of a tragedy and indulging in a sort of mental complicity with the crimes committed by actors, the spectator gives thereby an imaginative satisfaction to his own passions and desires. His soul is thus purged and purified of all that is evil, obscure and criminal. B. Ordynsky, the learned Russian translator of Aristotle's "Poetics," speaks of the Catharsis as follows:

"Those who have become insensible to their own sufferings and to the sufferings of their fellow-men are cured of their callousness. On the other hand, those who are capable of sympathizing with others are purged of every selfish sentiment and motive."

The magic influence of a theatrical performance upon ailing children has been demonstrated by companies of English clowns. These clowns were permitted to visit the children's hospitals in London. By performing their funny skits at the bedside of the little patients they did as much for them as some of the best London physicians with their scientific methods of cure.

Let us recall the importance which an ignorant Shamanist, or a Russian sorcerer, attaches to his theatrical costume

and gestures when he is summoned to the bedside of a patient. Let us consider the theatrical character of the act of " charming a toothache away " among Russian peasants. Finally, let us recall the feeling of new vitality which we experience after having seen an interesting theatrical performance.

Theatrotherapy is still in its initial stage of development. Besides, it is impossible to do justice to such a subject in a chapter of this length. Some day I hope to write a book about it. In the meantime I simply should like to draw the reader's attention to this new cure as employed by some physicians and by some stage managers in whose power, strange as it may seem, lies one of the strongest weapons for safeguarding the health of mankind.

" *Ceterumque censeo.*" Our stage producers should be very cautious and discriminating in the choice of plays they are offering to the public. To entertain the spectators every night with pieces from the old repertory and always in the same old way is to overlook the fact that the human organism, when it becomes accustomed to the same medicine administered in the same way, ceases to derive any benefit from it.

Chapter XII

TO MY GOD — THEATRARCH

THE name of my God is Theatrarch.

I kneel before His holy image and pray to Him, my heart throbbing with love, my soul filled with mystical yearnings.

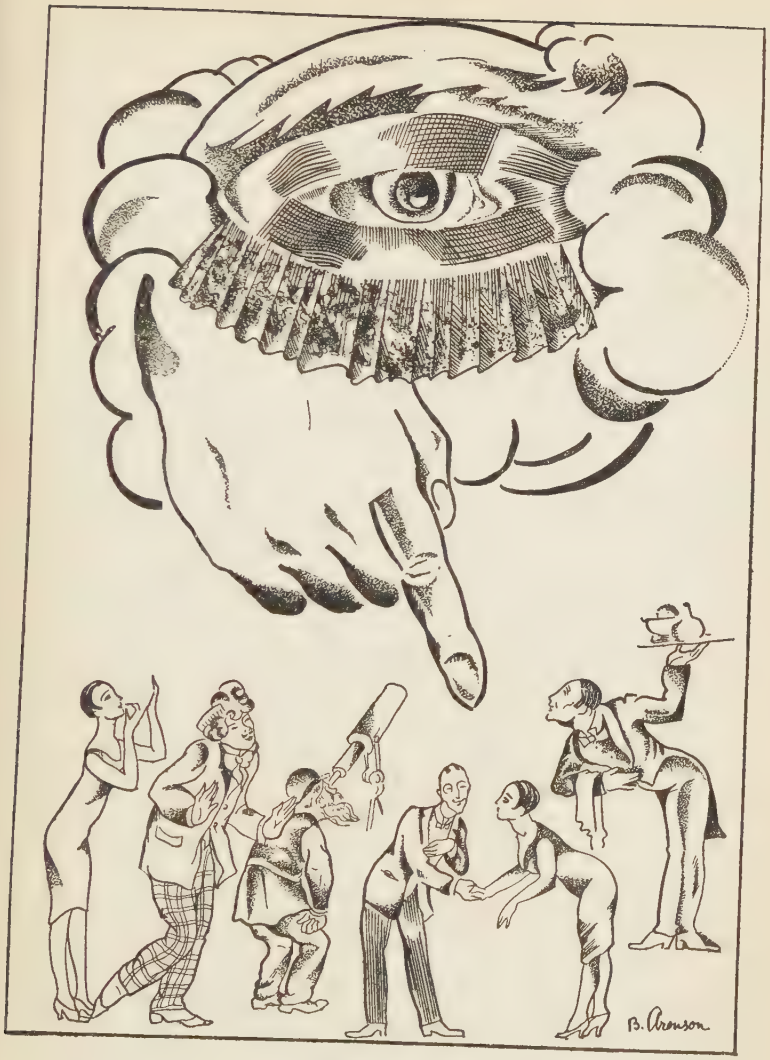
My intuitive premonitions and my philosophic knowledge tell me that man in his spiritual being is immortal and cannot disappear like a bubble. For my face and body are but masks and garments in which the heavenly Father has clothed my ego, sending it to the stage of this world where it is destined to play a certain rôle.

I am certain that my ego has already played thousands, or even millions, of rôles on these ephemeral platforms (for what platforms are not ephemeral?). And, no doubt, it will play many millions more in other masks and garments, or, in the worst case, in the same mask and garments.

I believe in the innumerable transformations of my eternal spirit, for my God is the aboriginal source of everlasting transformation of all things living.

I believe that my soul is nothing but an actor constantly changing his costumes and masks.

Difficult is the rôle with which my cosmic Stage Manager — Theatrarch — has entrusted me for my present apparition. Yet I will neither neglect my duties nor com-


B. Aronson

plain. As behoves a noble, and therefore a loyal histrion, I will take all my strength together and play it on this stage as best I can. And I believe that Theatrarch will not fail to reward me for my conscientious efforts: He will give me in the next drama a rôle more suited to my individuality, my intellect, my histrionic talent and my creative powers.

Scepticism often tries to confuse me with a tempting question. "Dost thou have free will?" it asks.

But I dispel unworthy doubts by answering: "The play is written, and I have no liberty to change it in its progress. It is, however, up to me to play it well or badly."

I believe that, having played millions of rôles, one more difficult than the other, I at the end will get close to Him, my Stage Manager, until, perfectly trained in the cosmic series, I shall become His inseparable and worthy associate.

He is the aboriginal source of eternal change and transformation whose Logos is the attainment of perfection in the infinity of times.

I kneel before His holy image and pray to Him, my heart throbbing with love, my soul filled with mystical yearnings.

PART II

Pragmatical

Chapter I

THEATRICALITY IN THE THEATRE

THIS is a book on the "Theatre in Life," and not on the "Theatre." Therefore I do not intend to speak here of things "theatrical" in the narrow, technical sense of the word. The variegated and complicated laws of the stage, theatrical literature, the old and new theatrical theories, the art of state management, the secrets of stage setting, make-up, actor's speech, etc., — all this will be the subject of a special volume.

Yet, theatricality which reigns in life is suggestive of certain truths which apply to theatricality in the technical sense of the word, that is to say, to the "pay-as-you-enter house." From that which has been said in the foregoing chapters conclusions important for the stage may be drawn. My purpose in the present chapter is to summarize some of these conclusions.

What kind of theatre should we have? Where does theatrical truth lie? Realistic decorations, naturalistic copies of reality, symbolical hints at the place of action, or simply "meaningful" clothes draping the stage and screens adorning it here and there, — which of these styles should be adopted for the staging of plays we go to see? Should our theatre be realistic, naturalistic or symbolic?

The anarchical dissimilarity of answers we get from our

leading stage managers is the best and the most eloquent proof of the fact that the very foundations of our theatre are deeply shaken. Our theatrical leaders do not know where to lead us, for they have lost the way.

I do not think that there are in our days such die-hard defenders of realism who, in the name of reality in art and for the sake of the most complete naturalness of things seen on the stage, would militate against the opera, the ballet, the operetta, the musical comedy, etc., would fight against the rhymed and rhythmical speech, would wish to see on the stage not only genuine " Meiningen " doors, but also the " fourth wall," and would dismiss with a scornful gesture the Hellenic theatre with its masks, choruses and other conventionalities. I firmly believe that the last nail has been already driven into the coffin of *such* realism, and that no one will go so far as to deny the rightfulness of at least certain conventionalities in the existence of the theatre.

Yet, realism is still alive, it is still a force. It does not assume any longer such barbaric forms, but it is still there. Take the old Moscow Art Theatre of Stanislavsky. It cannot be denied that it has played, and, to a certain extent, is still playing, both in Russia and outside of Russia, the rôle of a theatrical law-maker, of a theatrical standard-setter. And what, if not " naturalness," is the leading principle of this theatre? What, if not the attempts at transplanting naturalness, as we understand it in life, into the realm of art, is typical and characteristic of it?

I remember how I laughed when I saw for the first time the ultra-naturalistic production of Chekhov's " Three

Sisters" on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre. I laughed because I realized that the stage manager, who believed most earnestly that he had discovered "new ways," moved instead in the direction of least resistance. As I looked at the play a happy idea came to my mind. Indeed, I could knock Stanislavsky off his feet by saying that this ultra-naturalistic production was still far too conventional and theatrical. If he had been logical enough, he would have staged "The Three Sisters" in the following manner.

A small two-story house would be rented somewhere in the suburbs of Moscow — for instance, in Okhta. The "three sisters," with a brother, a nurse and a friend who was a doctor, would live in it. You, a spectator, would come with the other spectators under the pretext of looking for apartments. At the gate leading into the courtyard you would buy an admission ticket. You would be accompanied to the house by a janitor who would give you in a low voice all explanations needed (that is to say, the full text of the playwright's remarks, uttered, if possible, in a "Chekhovian" tone). In order to see through the keyhole, or through a half-open door, all the scenes of the play (for even in such stage setting one could not very well do without a bit of conventionality), you would have to visit the house quite a few times — in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening and even in the night, when you would behold it in flames (for the fire which must take place in the abode of the three sisters would be, of course, a one hundred per cent "real" one).

What could be more realistic than this! The whole

story of the three sisters would unfold itself before your eyes in surroundings full of prosaic truth and convincingness. The absence of the " fourth wall " wouldn't shock your reality-loving soul for a minute! You would even be able to touch this " fourth wall " with your own hand. You would see that it was genuine, and this would definitely set your mind at peace — " No theatrical lies! No decorations! " The last act would take place in a real garden (this would be both convincing and very easy to produce). As an idle passer-by taking a stroll and wishing to see whether the fire had really wrought much havoc upon the little house, you would be able to take a look at everything, to observe, without being observed, all that was going on in the family of the three sisters. Meanwhile, a company of soldiers would pass by to the accompaniment of a brass band (even in this the requirements of the play would be complied with!).

Is this not the ideal of naturalistic production? When I suggested this idea of mine, with a perfectly composed and serious face, to an old and important lady, she looked at me with astonishment and said: " *Vous êtes un fou, mon cher!* " Yet, on second thought, she agreed that Mrs. X., Count K. and Mr. Y. would " love to see it: they are so fond of everything original and brilliant." Yes, any nonsense can pass in our days for an idea, and for an " original " and " brilliant " idea, at that.

While the Moscow Art Theatre has been copying life in all its details with a zeal worthy of a better application, a simple-minded Chinese player represented on the stage of a Manchurian city the horses of a wealthy mandarin in

the following manner: Nothing (not even puppet horses) was to be seen on the primitive boards of his poor playhouse. Yet he showed with gestures and movements that he was walking among eight steeds. Moreover, watching his wonderful mimicry, his smiles and his grimaces, spectators realized that this horse was a rare beauty, that that one was not bad, either, but had the habit of biting, while still another one was vicious and pranced. The fourth horse, he made the spectators understand and believe further, was a little sick (he did not know what was the matter with it!), while three others were still very young, playful and hot-headed fellows. The last horse was old, it was true, yet he loved it more than all the others. He was now going to saddle them all, and he himself would ride on his favourite, on the last one. Then he tied the horses to the gate of the rich house of his master and disappeared for a minute to tell him and his guests that they could start on their trip. You should hear what a unanimous "how" ("good," "bravo") shook the theatre when eight actors appeared on the stage, jumped on these imaginary steeds and galloped away! I don't know whether the Moscow Art Theatre has ever dreamed of such enthusiastic protests of approval and admiration!

Does not this example show clearly enough what the public wants to get when it goes to the theatre, what it expects from the theatre? The playwright, the artist, the player, the stage manager may be interested in various technical experiments, in new attempts at obtaining such and such results, etc. But the spectator, the mere spectator who has bought the admission ticket and who sits in his chair

with all his attention tied to the stage, needs and wants nothing but *illusion*, theatrical *illusion;* he thirsts for the joy of *transfiguration.*

It is interesting to note that the conventionalities of the Chinese theatre, which astonish us, men of the twentieth century, would not have astonished in the least the Europeans, for instance, the Britishers, of the sixteenth century. For Shakespeare's theatre was in many ways similar to the boards of the Manchurian player. Indeed, " Chinese horses " compare very well with Shakespearean horses. Read the following passage from the Prologue of " Henry the Fifth ":

> . . . Let us . . .
> On your imaginary forces work.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
> Into a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance;
> *Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them*
> *Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.*
> For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
> Carry them here and there. . . .

And Shakespeare jokes and ironizes with a charming humour, through the mouthpiece of the chorus, over the poverty of his stage in scenic equipment:

> . . . Can this cockpit hold
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air of Agincourt?

But, our staunch realists may ask, why should we not stage a play that must take place in the "vasty fields of France" — in the real "vasty fields of France"? In other words, why should we not borrow decorations from actual life?

Such attempts have been made more than once: the theatre with "nature for decorations" is not a new thing. Yet they have always resulted in failure, in a complete "eccentric" failure. Nor can it be otherwise, for the only thing that impresses us in the theatre is the *illusion*, no matter what its source may be — the acting of a player, the effect of the stage setting or anything else. And what illusion of theatrical transfiguration can I expect in the surroundings where everything is solid, one hundred per cent "real" matter, where everything is the reality from which I should like to flee? Such scenery will outweigh and kill the acting of any genius whatever be his efforts to fire my imagination fettered by the unimaginative naturalness of things I see.

Everything in the theatre is, and *must be*, conventional. There exists at the moment of theatrical perception a sort of silent agreement, a sort of *tacitus consensus*, between the spectator and the player whereby the former undertakes to assume a certain attitude, and no other, towards the "make-believe" acting, while the latter undertakes to live up to this assumed attitude as best he can. The spectator, as it were, says to himself: "This is a piece of canvas, but I willingly take it for the sky." If he cannot do so, it is either the fault of the artist who painted the decorations, or the fault of the player who betrays by his

apathetic gaze his sceptical attitude towards this "sky," or else of the spectator himself, who is so dull-minded as to be utterly unable to mistake a makeshift for a real sky.

I don't know you, sir! Get out of my way. When I see you on the beach with nothing but a bathing suit on I won't believe that you are a king, however haughty is the tone in which you address me. "A fool," "a drunkard," "a stupid impostor," I shall say. But if you receive me with a well-cut paper crown on your head, if you are surrounded by "noble," silently respectful courtiers, if I see at a distance a cardboard throne and if you wear on your shoulders a royal mantle (the fact that it is made of a bath-towel instead of ermine won't shock me at all), I shall have in my mind a clear and convincing conception of proud royalty, of royal power. Perhaps I shall even tremble for a minute in awe and fear (just for the sake of my own enjoyment, of course). The same applies to decorations, for decorations are the costume of the place of action.

You only give a start to my fantasy, set it working, and it will offer me in the most obliging manner all I want to see. If, however, you give me on the stage *all that* which I see every day in life, what will my poor fantasy, shackled by these commonplace things, do? It will flee from the untheatrical theatre as it has fled to this theatre from untheatrical life.

It is not the naturalness, but the *convincingness*, of things seen on the stage that gives birth to theatrical illusions. Hence, it is not the subject itself that must be shown in the theatre, but a *picture* of this subject, not the action itself, but the *representation* of the action.

"It would be simply ridiculous," says E. T. A. Hoffmann in his "Cruel Sufferings of a Stage Director," "if the spectator expected to be convinced of the reality of decorations shown to him without assisting the producers of the play by his own imagination. In order to believe that all these castles, trees and rocks designed on canvas and unnatural in outline and proportions are real, one must will them to be real." The theatre is conventional through and through. And it is exactly in this that lies the source of the divine joy it gives us.

"Let us . . . on your imaginary forces work. . . . *For 'tis your thoughts* that now must deck our kings, carry them here and there. . . ." *Your thoughts*, dear spectator! If, sitting in the theatre, you have definitely made up your mind not to believe in this "bunk," in this unreal and self-sufficient reality shown to you on the stage, then even genuine diamonds will appear to you as false ones, human voices will assume the squeaking sounds of a phonograph, live flowers will transform themselves into the camelotte of a cheap department store. I once overheard in a theatre the criticism of an old lady with an eternally sceptical smile on her lips: "Excuse me, but that isn't natural," she observed with the contempt of an expert whom one cannot fool. "Have you ever heard people crying like that in real life?" Meanwhile, after the fall of the curtain the actress lay almost senseless on the stage; her make-up was literally washed away by tears; even the carpenters who entered the stage to replace decorations were deeply moved. . . . No, if you really care so much for naturalness, you'd better stay at home and enjoy the

sight of your brand-new bathroom with its modern improvements, or go and play golf, or walk to a restaurant and have a good, " real " and voluminous dinner.

The theatre is from beginning to end a lie, a deception, a premeditated lie and a prearranged deception. Yet, so charming is this lie, and the deception so miraculous, that if they didn't exist our world wouldn't be worth living in!

And, — isn't it truly remarkable? — the more *unnatural* is that which we behold on the stage, the more *touching,* in the loftiest sense of the word, it is. Melodramas are no longer *en vogue* (the idiotic age of " intellectuals," be thou cursed!); but in former days men and women, young and old, all sat with reddened eyes, all dropped tears, all blew their noses, beholding the " unreal " gesture of " theatrical " heroism or hearing a pathetic phrase. The spectators were especially impressed — this is very characteristic, too — at the moments when, putting an end to dialogues, the music set in. What, naturalistically speaking, could be more absurd than the sounds of an orchestra obeying the movements of the maestro's baton at a moment when a " heart-rending " scene is being enacted? Say what you will, my dear naturalists, but it is exactly this unnaturalness that impressed the melodrama goers. And this applies to the operetta, too. Can you imagine, for instance, anything more touching and sublimating than the scene from the " Perichole " when Picollo reads the letter and when the melody of the violins insinuates with graceful tenderness? —

Tu dois le comprendre toi-même
Que cela ne saurait durer — durer —
Et qu'il vaut mieux, Dieu, que je t'aime,
Et qu'il vaut mieux nous séparer. . . .

— When I hear it, I feel that I am a different, a better man! As if my soul had been purged of all that's evil and vile!

The theatre, — what a truly wonderful thing it is! It changes entirely the logic and the sequence of our emotions, it turns inside out the law of cause and effect by which our thoughts ordinarily abide. The theatre has *its own truths, theatrical truths,* which have nothing to do with the everyday truths of our reality.

From the viewpoint of life all is absurd in the theatre: the " fourth wall " is lacking, the light shines from the floor, as if emerging from the ground, no normal shadows are to be seen, the actors talk in artificially loud voices, always one after the other, interrupting and replacing one another in a strictly prearranged succession; what is still worse, they often recite long monologues (what fool would do that in real life?) and shoot solemn verses dingling with rhymes and bombastic images. Meanwhile the canvas castles vibrate at the movements of the air, and relief-less trees grow out of the uncamouflaged boards of the floor. Yet we do believe in this " reality "! One *is* carried away by these " truths," sympathizing here, in the orchestra, with the sham sufferings or joys enacted there, on the stage.

Looking in the microscope at infinitesimal cells of our body, at microbes, bacteria or Infusoria, one often doubts

their reality. That is to say, the mind knows that all of them do exist and are real, but . . . but these dead and cold truths fail to impress one's feelings. Yet, in the theatre, where everything is false from beginning to end, one cannot help believing. That is to say, the mind is perfectly aware of the fact that things seen on the stage are unreal; but the heart beats faster, one suffers and bites one's lips not to drop a tear, or laughs like a fool. One's feelings are impressed. Here, in the theatre, the "reality" is more attractive, more self-asserting, more talented than in reality. Where there is no talent, there is no theatre. There can be only a tasteless parody of the theatre with senseless grimaces and gestures. But if there is talent, just a grain of talent, the spectator will believe in any nonsense. Nay, he will believe in it much more willingly than he would believe in a fact from the world of realities, from this stupid and terrible world where everything seems to conspire with the object of fooling, disappointing and torturing us, where everything is so aggressively dull and senseless that, looking at the coffin of the beloved, one feels rather like biting and kicking than like crying.

When I am in the theatre I do believe in the immortality of man's soul, while in real life I am only trying to believe in it.

Boundless is the power of the theatrical illusion, for boundless is my will at creating imaginary realities! Just place me on the rails which you want me to follow, and my Reality-Imagination Express will dash me to any place, to any country, to Mars or Venus, or even to the Inferno! And when I am there, beat me, pour hot iron

down my throat, hoist me up on a torture wheel, — I will be grateful to you, I will gladly pay the expenses of the trip. I will believe in everything, too; I will believe that there is such a thing as the Inferno, that devils do reside in it, that I am "terribly" suffering indeed, and that my "torturers" are pitiless, really pitiless. Only, pray, do not forget the red flashlight (this is a very important point), see that the Devil's costume is as terrifyingly inspiring as possible and have first-class decorations for the Inferno (mountains, cliffs, don't you know, bonfires, etc.; the details are up to you). Besides, the player who is going to announce me into the Inferno: "Here he is, the scoundrel! Throw him on the frying pan for his ambition to be good to his fellow-men!" must emit these words in one breath, without stammering, without choking with laughter. On this I insist most categorically; I need it in order to enjoy my suffering for the idea. Moreover, I want to emerge from the theatre as a hero.

Boundless is the power of the theatrical illusion! Just relish that word "the-at-ri-cal"! As to the illusions from "real life," they are not needed in the theatre, for the theatre is not a panopticon. Whenever the theatre borrows from life its belongings without submitting them to the due transformation, it ends in a deplorable and irrevocable failure. All is conventional in the theatre; say "there is no fourth wall on the stage," and you will admit thereby that everything must be shown on the stage in some peculiar light, in the light of theatricality.

Perhaps the real problem confronting the stage is to

give us something as distant from the stale and boresome reality as possible; but this unnaturalistic something must be undeniably convincing and full of truth, of new and all-conquering truth which has nothing to do with that which we call "truth" at a drugstore counter, at a bank or in a lawyer's office.

The reader now understands what theatrical "school," or tendency, I advocate. When I hear that the theatre should be a temple, a school, a mirror, a tribune, or a pulpit, I answer: "No. It should be just a theatre" (I apologize for this use of tautology). The theatre must be first of all a theatre, that is to say, a self-sufficient artistic entity synthesizing, if necessary, all arts, making them serve its own ends and creating its own spiritual values, which are precious to us not because they serve this or that idea, or illustrate some moral doctrine, but because they are *theatrical*. There is "beauty for beauty's sake." There is also "the theatre for the theatre's sake." And only such a theatre is the real theatre.

Both *pure realism* and *pure symbolism* are irreconcilable with the true nature of the theatre: the former, because it aims at a useless duplication of life (and to duplicate life does not mean to serve art: it means to kill art); the latter, because it is in its very essence hostile to the direct and straightforward enjoyment of the visual perception. Professing, as I do, the principle of idealized theatricality, I advocate the *conventional realism*, or *stage realism*, that is to say, the free imaginative creation of stage images which command belief to the spectator's receptive mind.

It goes without saying that good players always act on the stage in this conventional manner. Their abstract minds may be poisoned by theories of "pure realism" and they may try to convince themselves that they are acting as naturalistically as they can; yet, the fact remains that instinctively, through the intuitive force of talent, they pay tribute to the salutary stage-conventionalism. I remember, for instance, how the Imperial Alexandrinsky Theatre produced for the first time, in 1906, my play, "Styopik and Manyurochka." The leading parts were played by two excellent artists of the old realistic school, by Mr. P. M. Medvyedev and Mrs. V. V. Strielskaya. What, it might seem, could be simpler for two old players (for they were both old at that time) than to impersonate "naturalistically" a hero and a heroine, who, according to the play, were also old, who belonged to the same social stratum as these players, who occupied similar stations in life? Yet, what a variety of conventionalities was set in action during the performance of the play! With an exquisite studied "naturalness" they avoided turning their backs to the public during a dialogue; when they stood deep in the back of the stage their voices sounded stronger and louder, while near the footlights they acquired exactly the right measure of softness and tenderness; each moment of silence, you see, was transformed into a "pause," pathetic, comical or tragical, as the case might be, each outburst of feeling was marked by a quick, yet excellently clear and audible shooting of a meaningful phrase. In a word, they played excellently, marvellously, adorably — long live real talents! — yet to say that their playing was the ideal of "nat-

uralness" in the everyday sense of this word would be to challenge the truth.

If, however, theatricality is instinctively practised by many, it has been hardly preached by anyone before me as a consistent and clearly developed theory. On the contrary, ever since the beginning of our century it has been derided, criticized and anathematized, to the detriment of the contemporary theatre, as a mortal, unpardonable sin.

In Russia it was being attacked every day in every way by the ideologists of the Moscow Art Theatre. Thus, Mr. Stanislavsky declared as early as 1911 that "theatricality is an evil to which one cannot reconcile oneself." What is still more characteristic, even such radical and audacious reformers of the Russian stage as V. E. Meyerhold paid no attention to theatricality and believed that "the new theatre should grow out of literature." Mr. Meyerhold changed his mind and began to extol theatricality only after my "Justification of Theatricality" had appeared.

In Western Europe theatricality was even more of a hopeless case than in Russia. Not only the European "old believers" in the theatre were loath to hear of it, but even the great Gordon Craig himself condemned it more than once in statements which bespoke his naïve belief in the purely *aesthetic* origins of the theatre.

It is true that the theatrical situation was somewhat different in Germany. Max Reinhardt, whose fame has not ceased to grow since the end of the nineteenth century, was, at least in theory, a supporter of the principle of theatricality. It is, however, exactly in theory that he was a sup-

porter of it. He borrowed his conception of theatricality from Georg Fuchs, who had never bothered to explain what he meant by the word "theatrical." As far as one can understand, Fuchs construed it as simply "artistic," or aesthetically perfect. Hence the theatre which was organized on his initiative bears the name of the Munich Art Theatre.

"It goes without saying that we have not yet attained the level of the incomparable productions of the Moscow Art Theatre," Fuchs declares in the Preface to the Russian edition of "Die Revolution des Theaters," which appeared in 1920. This is characteristic indeed, for one can speak of the theatricality of the Moscow Art Theatre only in jest. No, Fuchs's and Reinhardt's ideas have hardly anything to do with that which I call theatricality. Besides, the appearance of my "Justification of Theatricality" preceded, in 1908, by a few months, the appearance of Fuchs's above-mentioned work, so that even from a purely formal viewpoint the precedence and the authorship of the idea are mine.

Tempora mutantur! Indeed, the principles which I enunciated fifteen years ago are winning at the present time an undeniable victory both in Western Europe and in Russia. Suffice it to say that even the Moscow Art Theatre has bowed to that which it formerly anathematized: its latest production of Gogol's "Inspector" has been based on my doctrine of theatricality. (Here it may be noted, en passant, that "The Crooked Mirror," a famous pre-revolutionary comical theatre of Petrograd, was running for three years in succession my bouffonade-parody which

was also called "Inspector" and which pilloried the former ultra-naturalistic production of Gogol's famous play on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre.) Moreover, the Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre, that is to say, its autonomous children theatres, are also gradually adopting this doctrine of mine. As to the new and radical Russian stage directors of post-revolutionary years, they are decidedly indebted to me. Indeed, whose words does the famous and talented A. Y. Tairov repeat when he preaches the "theatricalization of the theatre"?

Indeed, the happy and sunny principle of theatricality is winning victories.

Chapter II

A LESSON TO PROFESSIONALS

HOW suggestive and expressive is the face of a professional actor who has come to " honour with his presence " the performance given by a company of amateurs! His encouragingly condescending smile, his melancholy gaze and the seal of blasé-ism on his brow seem to say: " Why shouldn't children amuse themselves? That's natural, after all. Is there a fool who should not like to be admired — even on a domestic stage? Of course, art is a sacred thing, but, pray, do not apologize, for I do not mind, oh! not a bit! I am broad-minded enough to absolve this little sacrilege. You want to ' try your forces,' you say? Well, well! You know the saying, ' Amateurs — profanateurs '? . . . Poor fools, how they tremble, how scared they are! So now you see that to be a player is not to be a stock-broker or an insurance-agent? etc., etc."

But when, during the intermission, the player is assailed by these " profanateurs " who, with beating hearts, want to hear his enlightened criticism, he is magnanimous, oh, very magnanimous indeed! Insincerely and modestly: " Bravo, well done! Only why did you select this play? For it isn't an easy play at all! Yes, by the way, if you don't mind my friendly advice, speak a little louder and don't show that you are afraid. But that's nothing, of

course. On the whole — very, very well. I imagine how many times you have rehearsed it, poor fellows! "

It is only at amateur performances that the face of a professional shines with such self-satisfaction and pride. For it is only here that he becomes fully aware of infinite difficulties of the "divine art" which he commands with such "majestic ease": "Here, you see, the voice should sound metallic; this monologue should be begun, as it were, lazily to bring out tragical notes at the end of it — tra-a-agi-cal, don't you know! And now, what a fool! Why does he 'press the pedal' in such an unostentatious passage; here — quicker, much quicker, it must sound like a fire-cracker. Why doesn't he come up to the very front of the stage? Didn't I feel that he would ruin the ending, and what an ending, at that! Well, you cannot blame him. Lack of experience! "

"Lack of experience." Of this "experience," or, rather, of the impression which it produces on a deep-minded and astute observer, we are told by Dostoyevsky. Describing in the "Notes from a Dead House" a performance which was given in a Siberian prison by criminals, he says: "This was really wonderful. Looking at these improvised players, one could not help thinking: What remarkable strengths and talents are being wasted in poverty and obscurity, for no purpose! " Yet, alongside of amateurs, Dostoyevsky beheld also an "experienced player." "One of the parts," he narrates further, "was played by a fellow who probably saw in his life the performances of our provincial theatres, or possibly was familiar with some domestic theatre. He believed that all his

comrades were ignoramuses, that they did not even know how to walk on the stage. Hence he walked as, one may presume, pseudo-classical heroes walked in olden days: after having made a long step he stopped for a while, threw back his body, looked with affected pride around and then made one more step, and so forth. . . ."

I recall in my memory thousands of actors with whom I have chanced to work or whom I have chanced to observe. . . . And, strange feeling! they all fuse in my mind into one typical figure, into one characteristic image. . . . This image appeared to me as some automat, as some soulless and impersonal machine which, wound up by an invisible hand, reproduces any record, walks, makes wry faces, smiles, becomes "graceful," "terrible," "pathetic," "enthusiastic"! An "impersonating machine"! The wheels rattle, the motor puffs, the steam whistles and . . . the astonished spectator beholds the production of cheap, ready-made theatrical "goods." These goods are tested, examined and sorted. The defective pieces are thrown overboard, while the satisfactory ones are sold for money. To-morrow we shall again learn from the papers what goods are the best and the most asked for, which are adulterated and which are entirely unworthy of the buyer's attention.

Please do not misunderstand me. I admire talent (you know how enthusiastic I am), the technique is a very valuable thing, too (don't make me repeat commonplace truths), yet I maintain that even in the acting of the most talented professional there appears at times something torturingly distasteful. This something is his discouraging

" to-night as yesternight," his never changing, " stamped " interpretation of this or that part, his effective gesture before the fall of the curtain.

For these reasons I permit myself to hope that those who are fond of field flowers growing far from pretentious hot-houses and from the daily cares of a scientifically trained gardener; those who relish with delight the naïvely tasteful dinner cooked by a young hostess (look how charmingly she blushes at the thought that her simple dishes cannot compete with the French kitchen of an expensive restaurant); those — mark me — who have not lost the capacity of being intoxicated by the caresses of an innocent girl, in spite of the fact that these caresses are ridiculously naïve in comparison with the exquisite skill of a professional " priestess of love," will share with me the quiet joy which pervades my heart when I am present at a good performance given by modest amateurs.

Nor am I the only one who feels that way. Such confessions may be heard even from " real " players (can you beat it, *real* ones!), unless, of course, their " augustus eyes " have been entirely blinded by footlights. I will quote as an example the words of Mr. Lorence, a professional Russian actor, who says in his " Psychology of Theatrical Life ": " Once I found myself in a theatre where ' Fofan ' was performed by a group of amateurs for the benefit of some charitable institution. It was played fairly well, too. In our theatre ' Fofan ' scored no success: we were overdoing and overplaying it, we allowed ourselves too many tricks, we spoke too loud, as if the spectators were deaf. . . . I admit that a good actress-amateur can be

better than a professional, for who are our professionals, after all? Girls who have graduated from some dramatic school."

Let us forget for the moment numberless anecdotes to the effect that the unexperienced hero-amateur imprinted with his moustache enormous black zigzags on the cheek of the heroine whom he had to kiss, that the performer of the comical part got really drunk, that the prompter got lost in his book and kept misleading the actors by his nervous whispering, that Mr. So and So "rehearsed" with Miss So and So with such zeal that, to avoid scandal, he found himself obliged to marry her, etc., etc. Instead of enumerating these "pearls of humour," we will recall a few facts from the history of the Russian theatre. This, I hope, will prove to us that theatrical amateurs deserve something more than idiotic jokes and gibes.

Who was the founder of the theatre in Russia? An amateur, a certain Feodor Volkov, the stepson of a merchant from Yaroslavl. This man "exerted himself since early youth, together with some government clerks of his city, in the art of theatrical presentations." When Ignatiev, a dignitary from St. Petersburg, arrived in this city in 1751 he found there a real theatre which had been excellently organized and equipped by Volkov. This became known in the capital, whereupon Volkov, his brothers and some of his assistants were summoned to appear before Empress Elizabeth. Her Majesty admitted them to the School of Noble Cadets "in order that they might enlighten their minds with science." A few years later, in

1756, she issued an " ukase " by which the Russian Theatre was founded.

That at the dawn of the Russian theatre magnate-amateurs played better (that is to say, in a more refined and aristocratic manner) than professional hirelings may be deduced from various documents, for instance from a well-known letter of Empress Catherine to Voltaire: " It has probably been brought to your knowledge," wrote the Empress in 1772, " that in the mansion which was built for three hundred nuns, five hundred noble girls are being educated at the present time [this is a reference to the so-called Smolny Institute. — N. E.] . . . This is the second year that they are performing, on my order, different comedies and tragedies. *They play their parts better than do our professional actors. . . .*"

What the Empress meant by " better " we cannot ascertain, for the theatre of that time was dominated by the pseudo-classical school, which was entirely different from that which we see on the stage in our days: actors changed artificially their voices, resorted to grossly exaggerated declamation, addressed important phrases to the audience instead of addressing them to their partners, ran up to the front of the stage in order to utter a meaningful word or remark, disappeared from the stage with the right arm lifted high in the air, etc., etc.

The pseudo-classical traditions were vanquished and overcome on the Russian stage, also thanks to an amateur. This " revolution," which took place in the middle of the nineteenth century and which is usually associated with the name of the great M. S. Schiepkin, whom I have already

mentioned, had for its author Prince P. V. Meschersky, a wealthy magnate from the province of Kursk.

No sooner did Schiepkin see, on a domestic stage, the acting of the prince than he decided to forsake the pseudo-classical tricks and to adopt the principles of this aristocratic performer. Here is a passage from his "Memoirs":

"I felt as though it were a dream, for everything got mixed in my mind: 'The prince does not know how to speak on the stage,' I said to myself; 'he speaks too simply, without affectation.' Yet, a moment later I realized that it was exactly this that fascinated me in his acting: he actually seemed to live on the stage. . . . I was deeply dissatisfied with myself: how foolish it had been of me to criticize him a minute before for this wonderful simplicity and unaffectedness! I said to myself: 'As soon as I am back in Kursk I will astonish my comrades! Poor fellows, they have never dreamed of this wonderful, simple acting!' . . . Great was, however, my astonishment when I tried for the first time to speak on the stage in this unaffected manner and realized that I could not do so. I remembered how Prince Meschersky spoke, and tried to imitate him. Yet, though I used all his intonations, I felt that everything was unconvincing and affected in my speech. I could not realize that, in order to seem natural, one has to use one's own voice and adapt it to one's own feelings without monkeying the voice and the feelings of the prince. A happy chance helped me realize it some time later. Ever since, I have followed this new system consistently and with assurance, though my old scenic habits continued to linger on and to hamper my efforts. . . ."

Let it be noted here that " Schiepkin's school " is, for obvious reasons, an erroneous *terminus technicus*. It is used in the Russian theatrical literature to define that tradition of scenic realism which was founded by the great actor. Yet, as the reader will understand from the just quoted passage, this tradition should be called " Prince Meschersky's school." It must be added to the honour of Schiepkin that he was not to blame for this mistake of terminology, for he admitted with perfect sincerity that " his method " was not his. " All I have attained in the art of acting," he wrote in his " Memoirs," " I owe to Prince Meschersky. He was the first man who made me realize what *real* art is and how it must be served."

If we use the word " amateur " with a certain liberality, we shall be bound to admit that all our provincial theatres which gave birth to a long series of our dramatic stars were organized by the efforts of influential amateurs who brought to the stage their serf-actors. No new idea, no original and fruitful theatrical undertaking, was started in Russia otherwise than on the initiative of enlightened amateurs. Here is, for instance, F. F. Kokoshkin, who, in the thirties of the nineteenth century, introduced into the practice of life the dream of theatrical reformers of our time, — organized " an open-air theatre "! I mean the theatre in the Neskuchny Garden where " spectators had for decorations the setting sun " which shed its soft light on " strange, unusual presentations." Before persuading the directors of the imperial theatres to organize this original institution Kokoshkin had tested his idea in his own country estate: " his men performed on a spacious hill a Greek

tragedy translated into the Russian tongue." Kokoshkin deserves mention not only as the author of this theatrical venture, but also as an ardent lover of dramatic art who patronized with touching sympathy all improvised actors and enthusiasts of the stage. Thus, in a letter to Prince P. V. Volkonsky (ex-Minister of Court), he wrote: "I consider it useful to admit to theatrical performances all those who dream of becoming players, no matter to what social class they belong. . . . Even in the lowest social orders talents and geniuses may be found. Enlightened by science, they may become real stars of the stage."

I do not intend to enumerate here all the interesting and edifying theatrical undertakings which were started in Russia by non-professionals. The Russian theatre, I repeat, is greatly indebted to them, and the list of such undertakings would be long indeed. I will mention but a few facts. Let it be remembered that it is amateurs who produced for the first time, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the now world-famous "Eugene Oniegin" of Tchaikovsky, "Khovanschina" of Mussorgsky, and various other operas; let it be added that Count Alexey Tolstoy's historical trilogy — "The Death of John the Terrible," "Czar Theodor" and "Czar Boris" — was also enacted for the first time by aristocratic amateurs (in the homes of Prince M. S. Volkonsky, of Count A. D. Sheremetev, etc.) under the supervision of Emperor Alexander II himself; finally, the just mentioned author's great namesake, Count Leo Tolstoy, made his début as a playwright also thanks to improvised players — society men, for it was in domestic

theatres that his " Fruit of Enlightenment " and " Power of Darkness " were performed for the first time.

It is interesting to note that at the close of the nineteenth century quite an epoch was inaugurated in the history of the Russian theatre by leading Russian painters who began, at that time, to take an active part in the artistic side of theatrical productions. This we owe to non-professionals, too. It was for the domestic theatre of S. I. Momontov that a group of painters (and what painters! — Polienov, Wrubel, Vasnietzov, Korovin, etc.) drew costumes and decorations. In the years that followed, Russian theatres competed not only in the choice of performers, but also in the choice of experts who supervised the decorative part of their productions.

Soon afterwards yet another page, or even chapter, was added to the history of the Russian theatre by a fanatical amateur. I mean the theatrical experiments which were tried at the Hunting Club of Moscow by a certain K. S. Alexeyev, who subsequently became known to the world under the name of Stanislavsky. For it was exactly in this club that the future father of the Moscow Art Theatre sought new paths for the materialization of the " Meiningen " principles of realism, attempted new, untraditional productions of Shakespeare, Hauptmann, Ostrovsky, and decided to organize, together with V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, a realistic theatre. . . .

To conclude this brief, unjustifiably brief, survey of theatrical amateurism in Russia, I will mention the so-called Ancient Theatre, which had greatly contributed in the pre-War years to the success of daring theatrical ex-

perimentation. This institution, of which I had the honour to be the organizer and the stage manager, devoted its efforts to the artistic reconstruction of ancient dramatic works in ancient stage setting and surroundings. It thus resuscitated some of the Hellenic tragedies, the Spanish playwrights of the sixteenth century, etc. About the same time I also worked as stage manager in the dramatic circle of Baroness I. A. Budberg, which distinguished itself by a whole series of edifying theatrical experiments, symbolically abstract, theatrically imaginative, etc. (it was there, by the way, that Shaw's " Candida " was produced for the first time).

I have worked in my life both with professionals and with amateurs, and I can assert on the basis of my own experience that there is a marked difference between the former and the latter in their respective attitudes towards theatrical work and duty. The comparison, I am afraid, will not be to the credit of the professionals.

To begin with, I have always been struck by the difference in the very method of work. An amateur (I mean a genuine amateur, and not a youngster who wants " to have fun ") is always conscious of the fact that he is inexperienced and " green." Hence, he begins to study his part with a sort of " sacred fear," with utmost zeal and with a keen feeling of responsibility before the public which he dares to " delight," to " edify," or even simply to entertain by his début on the stage. He goes to a library and digs up all imaginable " documents " and " data " which may add to his understanding of the part he is going to play, takes to heart — and to mind — every bit of advice

given to him by the stage manager, repeats hundreds of times every "difficult paragraph" and knows his rôle by heart a few days before the first rehearsal. The night of the performance is for him the night of initiation, of attainment, of trial and exploit. It is for the sake of this "sacred hour" that he has laboured with disinterested conscientiousness, that he has passed through the pangs of "creative sufferings," etc. The "public theatre" thus transforms itself into the "theatre for oneself."

Now, the method of a professional's work is essentially selfish (of course, there are happy exceptions). The only thing he cares for is "to make a rôle" with the minimum of effort and the maximum of success, of *his personal* success — for he hardly gives a thought to the success of the play, of the theatre or of the theatrical idea.

How could you expect him to tremble in awe before the "high mass of art," if he plays the same part every night? He, the old habitué of a near-by cabaret, scoffs at the idea of "ascetic fasts and prayers" on the eve of the performance!

An amateur will rather die than act in a mean and unworthy play; as to a professional, he will appear with the greatest pleasure in any trashy thing, provided that his part is a "trump card."

An amateur is in the seventh heaven if he feels that the ensemble is good, for he realizes that in art, as in nature, "one swallow doesn't make a summer"; a professional will play with any idiots, nay, will even prefer to play with idiots, for this will make him "a natural star," a centre of attention.

An amateur is unselfish, he works for the sake of work, of theatrical achievement. It is for this reason that he appears at rehearsals before the appointed hour and spends his energy without economizing. A professional . . . well, who would speak in earnest of a professional's zeal, if it is only the threat of a fine that can drive him to a rehearsal! " The theatre for oneself? " he will ask with an ironical smile. " It seems to me that the theatre exists first of all *for the producer*, who gets the money; then *for the public*, who pays the money. I will call it a ' theatre *for myself* ' only if I get my salary regularly and in full. I won't deny that such things do happen, once in a while! "

Let it be stated once more that in the theatre, as anywhere, there are happy exceptions. Yet the general rule is that professionals are . . . professional, that is to say, " pay-me-and-I-will-work " men, artisans, but not artists.

It goes without saying that one may earn one's bread not only with talent, but even with genius! But this is not the point. The thing that matters is that the earning of one's bread entails unavoidable compromises, and *art suffers no compromises.*

A conscientious player may realize fully well that a year or two of study and concentration wouldn't hurt, that a little history, psychology, aesthetics, etc., would be helpful, that to make one's mind work is not a bad thing either (it is sheer nonsense that one can learn to wear the costume of a knight or of a Wagnerian hero in ten minutes from an encyclopædia). Yet the poor devil is busy, he has " no time." It's but natural that, vexed by this tragical situation, the most talented addict themselves to the bottle.

Indeed, one hundred and seventy years of the history of the Russian theatre provide us with telling and edifying examples. The names of great amateurs outshine almost entirely the names of professionals, for the share contributed to the glory of Russian histrionics by the latter is almost insignificant in comparison with that which we owe to the former.

Both history and my personal experience lead me to believe that the creation of new theatrical values and the renovation of obsolete theatrical forms encounter the bitterest enemy in the person of the professional player who may be at times a brilliant, an unsurpassed impersonator, but who is always a faithful subject of the art-killing Routine.

If the names of a few professionals are not erased by time from the Book of History, this will be due solely to the fact that these men were not only professionals, but also genuine *amateurs*.

An element of enlightened amateurism — such is the vivifying serum which must be injected into the soul of a good professional.

The scornful oblivion, if not the passionate curse, of history awaits those who think only of making money in a temple where sacrifices should be offered.

Truly, the traders should be expelled from the temple.

Chapter III

A LETTER ON THE PUBLIC THEATRE

(*From My Private Correspondence*)

CHÈRE Tante, —

Conveying to you my sincerest gratitude for the ticket which you have kindly sent me, I must disappoint you again, however painful it may be for me, by my definite decision not to attend the show.

I realize fully well that my sustained reluctance to visit the theatre must strike you as something abnormal, if not pretentiously foolish. I assure you, however, that I am neither a candidate for the insane asylum, nor a snob wishing to *épater les bourgeois*, nor yet a heartless egotist repaying you with piggish ungratefulness for your kind attention.

If I were a hypocrite I might camouflage this reluctance of mine by telling you that I am very sorry, but that my duties as a stage manager will prevent me from meeting you at the show. Unfortunately I am not a hypocrite. Besides, you probably wouldn't believe me. You told me yourself not long ago that you once dropped in to see me at the theatre where I am working, and were deeply astonished by the statement of my assistant that, "after having directed in person the first performance of the play, Mr. Evreinoff has never appeared here again." (This is,

dear Auntie, one of the points which always figure in my contracts with producers; when they first hear of it they thunder with indignation, but they cool off and agree with a sigh when I tell them that I won't be able to write such "booming successes" as the "Inspector," "Behind the Soul's Stage," etc., unless I have my evenings free.)

As you have probably gathered from the foregoing, the present "refusal" of mine will be accompanied by a thorough "statement of causes." Indeed, it is my duty to explain to you with all frankness why I am so inimical to the theatre.

Permit me, then, to hope, dear Auntie, that you will read this letter with patience and attention, so as to understand and forgive me, for *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner. N'est-ce pas?*

I simply find no pleasure in going to theatres — such is the chief, or, rather, the only justification of my "preposterous" conduct!

"Why?" you will ask.

For many reasons, I will answer.

To begin with, all these theatres of yours, even the best of them, are trying to lure and to seduce me as if I were a fool, a simpleton, a banal middle-class idiot. Look at these tasteless signs and posters with the names of "stars" printed in enormous letters, at interviews in low-brow papers which may impress young modistes, but which horrify me, at senseless but enthusiastic criticisms written by our dramatic critics (oh, these gentlemen!), and you will understand that theatres resort to the meanest and

most reprehensible proceedings in order to attract my attention. This unscrupulousness coupled with the naïvely impertinent belief in my simple-mindedness and common-placeness naturally provokes in me a strong anti-theatrical reaction. I do not even stop to choose the words in which I might express my contempt for *such* a theatre; I simply ignore it. Don't you now understand, my dear Auntie, that, instead of scolding your nephew for his "eccentricities," you should praise him for his purely aristocratic *mania contradictionis*, for this unmistakable sign of taste and breeding? (It isn't for nothing that I have always been so proud of being a relative of yours!)

Perhaps I would forgive them these shameless methods of self-propaganda if they were trying (no matter how difficult it would be for them) to please *me*, *just me*, and to gratify *my* tastes — (in so far as they could do it, of course). Yet these individuals have the impertinence (just stop to think of it!) to invite into their playhouses *me* together with a whole herd of variegated animals!

"Leave me alone! Get out of my way!" Don't you think that this is the only answer I can give them? I certainly do not want to be invited in such a wholesale manner. And I protest against these cattle-yard invitations from the very summit of my aristocratic pride.

I see you threatening me with a reproachful finger: "Pride is a sin, etc." Well, forgive me, my dear, severe Auntie, — I won't shock you any longer! Suppose now that I have yielded, — most stupidly, unpardonably, idiotically. Suppose that I am in the orchestra of a playhouse.

What are they going to offer me? — Nothing but the aesthetics, ethics, erotics which they offer to the *multitude*, for this multitude is their autocratic sovereign whose vulgar tastes they are trying most subserviently to please. Indeed, how could a theatre exist without the support of the crowd? The whole theatrical business is based on this support.

For it is exactly a *business*, and a theatre is unavoidably a *store*. Only cheap and much-asked-for articles are sold in it. It would be a hopeless task to look here for real museum-pieces, for modest, unostentatious *chefs-d'œuvre* which only a real amateur can appreciate! The store — especially the five-and-ten-cent store — is not for such amateurs. These capricious, exacting and fastidious men form numerically such an insignificant per cent in the total population of a city that they would be hardly able to cover the producer's expenses for the electric sign alone, not to speak of other items.

No, dear Auntie, I suffocate here, I am bored to death, I feel uneasy. Let me "beat it"! "Be more humble, my boy. An hour of boredom won't kill you," your lips whisper. Well, if it were only boredom, I would not mind — you know how submissive I am. The trouble is, however, that this theatre of yours threatens me not only with boredom, but with real torture. These gentlemen, if you please, attempt at impressing not only the crowd, but also *me* ("Even most refined spectators will be satisfied"). They "entertain" everybody. I am a guest and I must accept with a polite smile these "entertainments." Do you realize what it may sometimes mean? I am fond

only of the best home-made peaches — preserves — but these people are trying to stuff me with raspberries of the cheapest delicatessen brand, adulterated with glycerine and saccharine, flavoured with vanilla and smelling like bad perfumery. They rub their blistered hands with the most proletarian self-satisfaction. "Don't you like it? We think it's wonderful!" And I feel obliged to force it down my throat!

Am I allowed, dear Auntie, to make a still more pertinent comparison? The theatre of which you are so fond always makes me think of a brothel (forgive me, I implore you!). It is a dreary, rather than a merry, establishment which intends, as I have said, to satisfy people with all imaginable tastes, except real fastidious gourmets! The only difference is that not the body, but the soul, is (*passez moi le mot!*) prostitutionalized in the theatre: the soul of the actor must give itself here to any brute who has bought the ticket! Moreover, it must give itself in the moments of the highest artistic tension, of a real spiritual orgasm! Is there anything more hideous than that? But, to go a little deeper, the body is not spared here, either. Indeed, what are these half-naked actresses and all these frankly lascivious gestures and poses if not the impudent "take me!" of a brothel? And how about a well-built tenor whose muscles are shown to everybody by close-fitting tights, whose alluringly painted face is a living challenge to the fair sex? And the suggestive rhythms of the music which set all these bodies in motion — what do you think of them? For once, at least, be sincere and tell me whether this isn't the sheerest immorality. Poor Auntie,

how must your lofty " pruderie " suffer in these " Maisons Telier "! What is, however, most remarkable is that people enter a brothel like thieves, with guilty eyes, with shy faces, while in the theatre they look almost like heroes! We boast without blushing of having " subscription tickets " in such and such a theatre, of being " regular opera-goers," etc. Isn't that really horrible? No, Auntie dear, all this is above my poor judgment. I refuse to comprehend it. I cannot understand, either, why you refuse so obstinately to call things by their real names.

I feel, however, that you consider yourself offended and that your lips are ready to utter a whole list of solemn words in defence of the theatre. " Aesthetics," " the temple of arts," " the sacred art," etc., — such are the things I will hear from you. All right, Auntie dear. I apologize. I will admit that I am not right. I will gladly consign my brutal comparisons to the waste-basket. But I must tell you that I have yet other anti-theatrical arguments, and very weighty ones, at that.

First of all, many of the few fastidious judges like myself are tantalized in the theatre by desperate attempts at keeping down bitter and venomous thoughts provoked by the show. " I'd be darned if I couldn't play this rôle better than this fool! " or: " They've certainly got *some* stage manager! It takes an accomplished idiot not to understand that during this act the stage should be all in soft blue colours," and so forth. What is still more tantalizing, one is often shocked by the play itself. " What a stupid *réplique!* Couldn't the author invent something better? " Believe me, such thoughts make one suffer at least as

much as narrow shoes or as an unexpected attack of hiccups at a moment when one has to deliver a solemn speech.

I know, you will say: "*Tu es trop difficile.*" Perhaps you are right; but if so, it is one more reason for me to avoid public theatres.

Moreover, tell me, *ma petite tante chérie,* what one should do in the moments when (this is, of course, a superlatively impertinent ambition!) one feels older, and, in certain things, wiser, than *any* playwright, even than Shakespeare himself. Just give up this silly ambition, you say? But this may be easier said than done. Yet perhaps you are right. Then tell me, please, where is the guarantee that your impossible nephew will be satisfied with their production of Shakespeare's tragedies? Where? What if they produce them badly? What then? Who will answer to me for the sacrilegious attempt at defiling the sacred memory of Shakespeare, of my idol, of my God?! Do you really want me to run this terrible risk? No, Auntie, that's cruel of you. You know very well that there are things of which I am afraid just as much as you are afraid of mice.

When, however, everything, literally everything, is perfect in your theatre, when even the most fastidious critic can only extol and praise, when the playwright, the actors and the stage manager have achieved real marvels, then . . . oh, then it's still worse: I feel like dying from envy, I spend a sleepless night and am seriously ill in the morning.

Now, Auntie, be fair and tell me whether I, with *my*

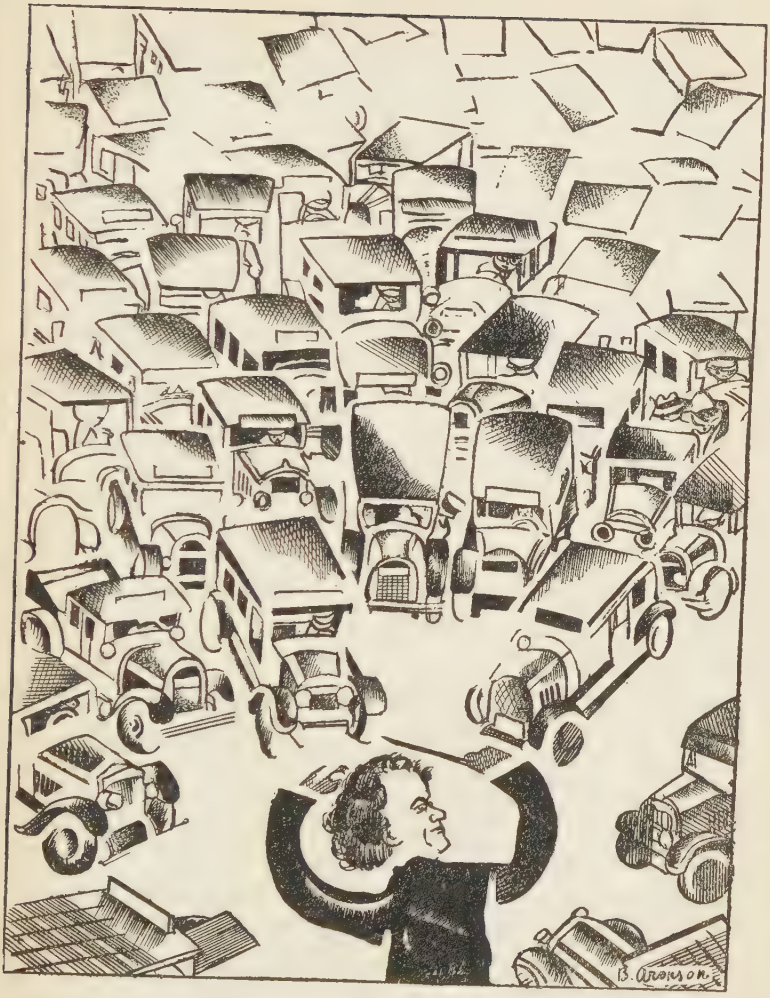
nerves and with *my* disposition, can visit the theatre. No, this *partie de plaisir* is not for me!

(It is certainly some "*partie de plaisir*": 5 roubles for the ticket, 2 roubles for the car, 1 rouble for refreshments during the intermissions, 15 copecks for checking a coat, etc. . . . I do not speak of the danger of catching a bad cold, of the fact that no theatre is fire-proof, of the vexing signs "Beware of Pickpockets," of the more than frequent cases of exchange of brand-new rubbers for old ones, etc.)

I will tell you frankly that even if the theatre itself were all right, intermissions alone would suffice to kill all the pleasure I would get out of it. Indeed, just think of it: at a moment when one feels like concentrating, like assimilating the impressions just received, like analysing things just seen, one is assailed by a crowd of "friends" who consider it their duty to "sparkle" with their snobbism, with their home-brewed "critical observations," with their "European-mindedness" or with their idle and tiresome gossip. You try to hide from them in the foyer, but they discover you there too, and the torture continues. *C'est plus qu'affreux, chère tante, plus qu'affreux.* Please don't try to convince me that it is a trifle.

Chamfort, your favourite, says of himself: "*Je hais assez les hommes et je n'aime pas assez les femmes.*" Why do you think that he is the only one to feel that way? Believe me, this statement of his will be readily endorsed by every real *homme comme il faut.*

Besides, *chère tante,* it is very difficult for the nervous children of our "nervous age" to remain seated, without



a single movement, as long as an act lasts. How do you know? — perhaps I can listen with attention only when I am walking up and down. How can you expect me, then, to accompany you to the theatre? I am telling you that I do not want to be nailed to a chair! There are persons who, in order to concentrate, must smoke a pipe or a cigarette. There are others who cannot stand the sight of a bald skull before their eyes, who are vexed by an avalanche of bobbed hair tickling their nose, by a pimple on a fat neck which shocks their sensitive eyes, etc., etc. How can you expect all such persons to attend theatrical performances? And then, these famous "theatrical reformers" *qui cherchent midi à quatorze heures*. . . . But of these people I will talk to you some other time.

Before concluding this letter of mine I should like to draw your attention to yet another anti-theatrical argument. The very idea that, in order to undergo the above-enumerated tortures in the theatre, I have got first to undergo for a good half-hour a whole series of preliminary tortures makes me moan with rage. For I must change my clothes, fight for a few minutes the cuff-buttons, which, feeling the proximity of a stiff shirt, always proclaim a strike and "walk out," scrub my cheeks with the razor (which, in such cases, always happens to be dull), settle the conflict between my feet and narrow patent-leather shoes, etc. Add to this that in order not to be late, I've got to rush, with a stomach which has hardly begun to digest the load that was thrust into it. Besides, I must part from my comfortable chair, from my book, from my cigar, perhaps from a woman. . . . No, the theatre is not for

me! Sorry, but you won't have the chance of seeing your nephew in the rôle of a martyr!

My conception of the theatre is entirely different. For I do have a theatre of my own, and there are no words which could make you feel how I love, adore and worship it!

"What do you call *your* theatre?" you will ask with a frown. Do not frown, dear Auntie; I am sure that you will be tickled to death when you learn what it is. That is to say, you know even now what it is, but you don't know that you know it.

I will explain everything to you when I see you personally.

Meanwhile, I will remind you of the words of Baudelaire's Stranger who has killed in his heart the love for his mother, for his brothers, sisters and friends, for his native country, for beauty, glory and wealth:

> "I love the clouds,
> The cold, flitting and lofty clouds."

Good-bye, Auntie dear. I hope to see you soon in . . . *my* theatre!

Affectionately yours (for how could I help being affectionate towards you, an ardent enthusiast of the theatre?),

Nicholas.

P.S. Yes, by the way, what do you like better, to drive in your own car or to ride in an overcrowded trolley-car? Drop me a few words about it, will you?

Chapter IV

MY FAVOURITE THEATRE

I REMEMBER how, having hardly rested in a dirty Moroccan hotel after a long and tiresome trip, I rushed in the company of a guide into the native quarters of Tangier with the excited curiosity of a theatre-goer who is afraid to miss the beginning of a new and absorbingly interesting play.

Half an hour later I found myself in a little inn at the crossing of five narrow, crooked and dirty streets, where I swallowed a few dried figs, a piece of sour Moroccan bread and a glass of sheep's milk. Then I selected a comfortable chair and let myself be carried away by a flood of impressions.

My eyes beheld an uninterrupted procession of men and animals, of lazy mules and dignified camels, of Arabs, Kabyles, Berbers, Bedouins and Jews in patriarchal "Oriental" attire, of women with covered faces and bare legs, of half-naked, squalid children, of Moroccan "sentries," of refreshment-sellers announcing their arrival by the shrieking, piercing sound of a little bell, of beggars with hideous red spots instead of eyes and with maimed arms and legs, etc. Now and then a street-clown wearing fantastically senseless rags would assemble a crowd of curious spectators, or a "noble" Spaniard would cross the street.

Turbans, kolpaks, fezes, bracelets on arms and legs, all imaginable costumes, all imaginable shades of skin, from pitch-black amber to terra-cotta, daggers, carpets, iron castanets, and above this medley of shrilling colours, objects and sounds, — a gloriously blue sky framed by dazzlingly white, sunlit walls and by the graceful summit of a minaret. . . .

An hour later I realized that all this reality was for me not reality, not life, but a genuine theatre in which the stage manager, intoxicated by the colourfulness of a " mass-scene," had allowed it to continue altogether too long.

In a few minutes, it seemed, all this crowd would leave the stage, and the principal characters, as yet unknown to me, would begin a dialogue in bombastically banal expressions harmonizing with this shriekingly picturesque stage setting.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. I said, unfortunately, because every decent stage manager would make it happen. This brought me back to my senses — reality became reality again.

It was a pity. . . . The mass-scene continued, repeating itself in all its details, becoming monotonous and uninteresting. As before, a " dentist " in colourful tatters manipulated with a sort of long nail in the mouth of his patient sitting in the centre of the market-place; a crowd of self-appointed advisers gave him, with gestures and piercing voices, the same bits of advice; again a suspicious-looking Arab annoyed a dignified English tourist with some sort of offers and suggestions, winking meaningfully at a

girl standing near by. The decorations did not change, the chief characters were still kept behind the stage by the obstinate stage manager. It was time to go home, or to rush to some other theatre.

Yes, it *was* a theatre, a genuine theatre in which I found myself in the rôle of an actor, at that! For the first time in my life I delighted in the incomparable joy of a full realization of my dream, for life actually transformed itself before my eyes into a theatre. And this happened naturally, by itself, without boards, without rehearsals, without prompters and theatrical tailors.

The only author of this performance, of this charming theatricality, of this sunny metamorphosis, was I, the free artist and playwright, the magician of the crossing of five narrow streets, the creative rebel who rejected life in its normal forms and imposed upon it my own, nobler and subtler, forms!

Indeed, I am a Zarathustra boiling the happy chance in my own kettle! I organize myself, and for myself, a theatre, I freely select my own scenic style for my own play, I transform with a majestic ease a passer-by into a player who tries to amuse me; I admire him, I pity him, I despise him, and when I am tired of the show, I go home without having paid a cent for my admission ticket.

You may believe me or not, but ever since that memorable day the public theatre has lost for me most of its charm and attraction. For now I decidedly prefer my own, "unreal," theatre.

For instance, before, I did not like the so-called social events — dinners, receptions, etc. But now a social event

is for me the greatest imaginable pleasure. I'm just crazy about it!

You enter a reception-room, say a few words for the sake of politeness and then sit somewhere in a corner, listening, looking and enjoying the show. For they are doing their best, they are almost bursting to please you.

I know them all very well! When they are not on the stage, that is to say, not in public, they are so dull that, looking at them, flies drop dead with boredom. They are ugly, dishevelled, ridiculous and stupid. They just "repeat the *répliques*" — of hunger, of sexual desire, of religiousness, of selfishness. They overwork themselves to a complete loss of human senses, or overdrink themselves to an equivalent degree. Yet, living thus day after day, they are waiting for something. . . .

I know what they are waiting for. They are expecting the hour when, having washed away their boredom and their commonplaceness, they will put on the masks of thoughtfulness, of lofty aestheticism, of prepossessing humour, of aristocratic refinement, of gallantry, aloofness, etc. In this new attire they will get together in order to amuse me for a few hours with a "demi-monde," real "monde" or even real "beau-monde" show.

They will pose and play, they will be "so simple and charming," so good-natured, graceful or significant. A little of Don Juans, a little of "viveurs," Hamlets, Othellos, "Dames aux Camélias," — their masks won't be monotonous, oh, no!

If only you could realize how difficult it will be for me

then to abstain from enthusiastic applause, from the sincerest "bravo," and sometimes also from indignant hissing, for — alas! — even the most talented of them may forget a passage in their part or utter a *réplique* in such a rough, soulless and false tone that I shall feel myself transplanted into the orchestra of a little third-rate theatre in a small third-rate provincial city.

PART III

Practical

Chapter I

"THE THEATRE FOR ONESELF"

IN the foregoing chapters mention has been made more than once of "the theatre for oneself," but no clear explanation of this term has been given. The dissatisfied, or, even, irritated, reader may be perfectly right in demanding such an explanation. And I feel that it is my duty to tell him in a concise and precise manner what kind of art this "theatre" is, what is the technique of its productions, what plays can be staged in it, etc., etc. All this will be done in the present chapter, as well as in the following chapters. Before doing it, however, I should like to draw the attention of the reader to a very suggestive peculiarity of man's cultural life which, unfortunately, often remains unappreciated and even unnoticed by the professors of sociology and history.

The fact is that when man, this essentially "social and sociable animal," attains the heights of cultural development, he begins to display essentially *unsocial* and *unsociable* tendencies both in his physical and spiritual life.

If the early stages of the evolution of mankind proceeded, mathematically speaking, under the sign of the social *integral*, its later stages may be always characterized by the sign of the social *differential*.

At first man gave up almost entirely the individual and the personal and surrendered himself almost completely

to the collective; yet, having attained a certain degree of social organization and well-being, having, so to speak, done his duty towards himself, he returns unavoidably to the *status quo ante*, to his provisionally surrendered *privacy*. — Such is, briefly speaking, the scheme of all human progress and evolution.

The first chapters of culture are always characterized by *collective* acts: people pray together, hunt together, work together, eat together, sleep together, indulge together in orgies and debauchery, wash in a public bath, etc. The same applies to the first chapter of all arts: early music is always collective, that is to say, choral, early dances are without exception mass-dances, early poetry, as we know it, has unavoidably the form of folk-rhapsodies, the early theatre is always a public theatre. In other words, the " ensemble " reigns in all departments of life.

The collectivistic principle becomes sometimes a real dictator of life, a genuine autocrat oppressing and suppressing all individuality, all privacy of man's spiritual life. For instance, a Spartan would probably describe creative artistic work unconcerned with the need and requirements of the community as reprehensible light-mindedness, if not crime.

Yet, providing a small group of privileged persons with wealth, unlimited power and leisure, history deals with her own hands a mortal blow to the dictatorship of collectivism. There always comes an age when, in one field of human activity after another, the collective begins to give way to the individual, the public surrenders the ground to the private, the ensemble-scenes are replaced by solos of the

leading characters. The public kettle, the "collective sexual feast," the mass-battue and other such things become consigned to the shelf of historical anachronisms. We laugh at the idea of participating in a round choral dance, or of washing together with our friends in a cabin which has been heated by our common efforts. Nor would we sit round a table and eat soup from a common basin otherwise than in jest. Moreover, even the reading of Homer can assemble no longer a crowd of friends and relatives; if they read Homer at all, and I am prepared to admit that some of them do, they prefer to indulge in this occupation with no spectators around.

We have learned the fascination of privacy. We know what delights can be derived from the gratification of our fastidious "egos," of our discriminating individualities. We are poisoned by the temptation of getting away from the collective, the mass, the crowd with its necessarily *average* tastes and ideas. We have come to realize that the standardizing principle of collectivism is a degrading nuisance, and we are trying to get rid of it wherever possible. Our highly refined and experienced "ego," this real gourmet of life and thought, has become completely autonomous, nay, autocratic. Yet, to our supreme shame, we still go to the theatre *in a crowd, en masse,* all of us together, and the theatrical producers are still trying to gratify us as a *homogeneous herd of cave-men!*

Think of the public theatre, or, rather, of that rigid, archaic form in which it has been handed down to us by our remote, collectivistic, perhaps even hairy ancestors. Is it not a shameful anachronism? What do really cultured

people think of it? Indeed, the time has come for us to gratify our theatrical instinct in privacy — as we gratify our other instincts. Indeed, the hour is ripe for "the theatre for oneself," for this new form of theatrical art.

Let those who have ears hear that, just as a real gourmet, seeking the satisfaction of his *individual taste*, avoids restaurants which attempt to satisfy all, so also a real lover of the theatre flees from vulgar public places in which thousands of proletarian and bourgeois stomachs are being stuffed with the theatrical corned beef and cabbage. And if a body refined to blasé-ism needs a special "panis," a special kitchen, an equally refined spirit needs special "circenses," special theatrical performances!

Let me now pass to the definition of "the theatre for oneself." *Theatrum extra habitum mea sponte!* Such is the scientific formula of this institution! Such is the medical prescription which I would give to all real aristocrats of the theatre tortured by boredom and languor.

Extra habitum! This means that the theatre which I am preaching has no special site or building. Its material weapons are limited to zero, or almost zero. Of course, if zero is too little for your fancy, that is to say, if your fancy is not rich enough, you may provide your theatre with a little better scenic equipment. Yet it must be remembered that fancy is the basis of all arts and that the power of imagination would be no power at all if it could not transform non-existing things into existing ones! To one who keeps this idea in mind, there is nothing easier than to organize a "performance for oneself."

A sculptor was once asked whether it is difficult to make statues. "Difficult?" he answered. "Not at all. You just take a block of marble and split off it that which you do not need. The rest will assume by itself the form of the statue. That's all there is to it." Well, if I were asked whether it is difficult to organize "performances for oneself," I would give exactly the same answer, with the only difference that there would be no attempt at witticism in it.

I feel, however, that there are readers for whom all these explanations are not sufficient. They want me to tell the whole thing without beating about the bush. All right, I will illustrate my idea with . . . concrete explanations and examples (*pardon, mesdames!*).

The art of "the theatre for oneself" is simply an improved (an artistically improved) edition of that practice in which each one of us indulges (for the theatrical instinct is common to all of us) and which is usually defined by rather vague and sometimes not very complimentary expressions, as, for instance, "to play the fool," "to play comedies," "to make scenes," "to feign this or that," "to play this or that rôle," "to watch the fight of two fools, or the quarrel of two lovers," etc. I believe that a couple of examples will make the whole thing perfectly clear. Here are the instances of "the theatre for oneself," from the simplest to more elaborate and complicated ones.

To sit on a bench in a park or square and look at passing crowds and automobiles.

To stand at the window and watch a girl dressing, or undressing, in the house across the court-yard.

To go to a party and behave there like "a queen," like "a gentleman of importance," like a "he-man and h—— -raiser," like a "misanthrope," etc., etc.

M. V. Babenchikov, a friend of mine, used to amuse himself in the following manner: he hired a taxi and, making the chauffeur drive at break-neck speed, absorbed with his eyes the uninterrupted flood of buildings, men, cars, etc., hurrying past him. He called this a "live cinematograph."

Count N. N. de Rochefor, my comrade, was fond of an altogether extraordinary amusement: he dressed himself like a Russian "izvozchik" (cab-driver) and stopped with his cab at the entrance of some friends of his. If the latter, going out for visits or shopping, hired him for a few hours, he preserved his incognito most cautiously and felt indescribably happy.

Here is, however, a still more unusual example. Living in a summer resort, I knew personally a gentleman who in the night penetrated into the villas of his friends and stole various things there. Having thus enjoyed the whole scale of thrills, fears and other emotions resulting from such an adventure, he would appear the next day in the villa where the robbery had taken place and would return with the most engaging apologies and smiles the stolen objects to their legitimate owners.

The same "theatre for oneself" instinct prompts men to play the rôle of detectives, to imitate Sherlock Holmes and other such heroes. These cases are, however, so frequent in all countries and so familiar to everybody that I need not dwell at length on them.

One more example: I have met a society woman who spent a few months . . . as a chambermaid in the house of a merchant. She told me that she wanted to write a novel laid against the background of the old-fashioned bourgeois milieu of Moscow and that she started on this adventure with the purpose of observing and studying this milieu. The novel has, however, remained unwritten; the experiences of the "chambermaid" have never been recorded — not even in a page or two *à la* Octave Mirbeau. I am sure that in reality the lady has never thought of writing anything. The only thing she wanted was the theatre "for the theatre's sake" — only this and nothing more. She was, however, ashamed to admit it. We should not forget that the real "theatre for oneself" is always shy and timid, that it shrinks in horror from publicity and that it thirsts for privacy and secrecy. We do not often admit even to ourselves that we are indulging in that sort of theatrical amusement. How, then, should we admit it to others?

For my part, I would never tell any "stranger" or "outsider" of *my* favourite plays, for while I am at home I am playing and dreaming, dreaming and playing all the time. My favourite plays would probably appear whimsically strange, or even foolish, or even — how do I know? — suspicious and reprehensible. It will be much, much safer if I keep them to myself, if I hide them most jealously from the rest of the world, if I die without having disclosed them. Yes, that will be much safer, indeed.

For why should I carry my treasures to the marketplace? Why should I open this strictly private theatre of

mine to the public? No, gentlemen, that would be too much. You cannot expect me to do it.

Besides, there is a wealth of examples from the experience of others, so that I even need not disclose *my* secrets. Here is, for instance, an excellent example of "the theatre for oneself" in a very high stage of its development: The famous Russian historian N. I. Kostomarov had a canary which lived in a cage in his study and of which he was very fond. He took all possible precautions in order to protect this little prisoner of his from the paws of "Bill," the big, impertinent tom-cat which was a pet and a darling of the whole Kostomarov family. Yet one day Bill managed to open the cage and to swallow the bird. The heart-broken historian decided to put the offender on trial. He organized a court in which he appeared in the rôle of the attorney, his friend, the well-known writer Mordovtzev, in the rôle of the defender, and a certain Mrs. N. Bielozerskaya in the rôle of the judge. Kostomarov's children and elderly mother were to be the jurymen (the mother however, refused: "My son has gone mad," she said with indignation, and left the room). The trial took place in the historian's study. Two servants brought in Bill tied to the empty cage of the poor canary. Kostomarov read the indictment and then began his speech. As he proceeded with it he spoke with more and more *entrain*, enthusiasm and fire. Those who heard him, maintain that this was the best speech he had ever delivered. He reinforced his accusations with a series of interesting quotations, outlined the rôle of cats in ancient Egypt and Rome, spoke with a brilliant convincingness of the moral side of

the whole affair. When he finished, everybody felt that this was, indeed, a heavy accusation. Yet Mordovtzev, who spoke next, proved to be an excellent lawyer and defender. He said that Bill was the victim of a demoralizing example; the historian, he maintained, was working in the presence of the stupid cat on his "Last Years of Poland," in which he tried to prove that the weak must unavoidably become the prey of the strong and that Russia was perfectly right when it swallowed Poland. "There can be hardly any doubt," Mordovtzev concluded, "that, breaking the cage of the late canary, Bill acted under the influence of his master's ideas and teachings." Whereupon the jurymen withdrew to another room and, returning a quarter of an hour later, pronounced solemnly the verdict of acquittal. . . .

In the chapters that follow, the reader will find a few examples of plays for "the theatre for oneself." It goes without saying that I did not compose them with the purpose that my readers should actually play them. First of all, this would be on my part an unpardonable naïveté. Besides, every artist of "the theatre for oneself" must be his own playwright. It is exactly in the free improvisation that lies one of the greatest attractions of this institution. But I believe that these plays will show the reader what kind of subjects can be used for this purpose and how these subjects must be handled.

Before finishing this chapter I should like to give the reader a number of valuable bits of advice concerning the stage management of "the theatre for oneself" plays. It is, however, exceedingly difficult to boil down this advice

to a few concise formulae. Being an essentially psychological institution, "the theatre for oneself" evades with great skill all primitive rules and regulations, escapes the freedom-killing bridle of heavy concrete definitions and shrinks in horror from the matter-of-fact narrative of schoolbook type.

My first advice is this: take your acting in "the theatre for oneself" in a perfectly earnest manner, for otherwise the whole affair won't be worth a nickel. The idea of your play may be undescribably humorous and comical. Yet, your *attitude* towards your own acting must be as serious as it can be. Do not pay too much attention to the aesthetic side of your theatre, to the details of the scenic equipment, etc. Remember that these things will only impede you on your way to the imaginary world for which you are bound. It is not at all so easy to jump over the "world-of-realities" fence. So spare the steed of your imagination! Don't prompt him to take barrier after barrier — he will be exhausted before half the road has been covered!

My second advice is equally important. Have this in mind: "It is easier to play in the company of others than in complete solitude. When many . . . participate in a play, one stimulates the imagination of the other, and no 'masquerading' stimulants of imagination are required. Not so in solitary plays." These interesting lines come from the pen of W. Wundt, a highly authoritative psychologist and scientist. I must confess, however, that the place marked by dots in the above quotation must be occupied by the word "children." Yes, I am sorry to say that Herr Wundt, in his purely scientific narrow-minded-

ness, speaks in the above lines only of children. Believe me, however, this rule-quotation-advice applies to *all* human beings, irrespective of their age and sex.

Third. The poorer in costumes, "decorations" and other such things your play is, the richer it must be in *movement* and *action*. Remember that the movements of your body constitute in themselves *a mask*, and that this mask can replace very well all other masks. The young Heliogabalus impressed his enemies not by the masquerading attire of the Romano-Oriental despot, but by the nakedness of his body which was *moving* with terrible speed! In a sense, this was undoubtedly a victory of the theatre *extra habitum*. This example should be remembered even in such "theatres" where there are no spectators whatever, where there is but one player and where this player uses as the main instrument of his art a . . . looking glass.

Fourth. Some of the plays require certain preliminaries. It is not always easy to get from the realm of facts into the realm of illusions by one jump. Therefore it may be wise to bring down into your soul the required mood and atmosphere by various — direct and indirect — preparative measures. If, for instance, the play is dreamy, misty and mystical, a sleepless night, a doped cigar and darkness may be helpful. If the play is kinetic and rich in action, ablutions, gymnastic and other such exercises may prove of use.

Let it be added that even simpler and stronger measures should not be disregarded. There are, for instance, cases when a good dose of physic, or an equally good dose

of alcohol, or some other similar " shake-up," on the eve of the performance, may greatly contribute to its success. Thus, after having " cleansed " your body in such manner, invite a friend who plays the piano decently and ask him to play Chopin's Mazurka, la-minor, op. 17, No. 4. Let him do it late in the afternoon when the dusk has already filled the room. Listen to the sounds of this divine piece, rocking quietly in a comfortable chair, smoking a doped cigar, closing your eyes, inhaling the odour of your favourite perfume and caressing with your hand a silk scarf of tender pink lying on your knees. If *all* these conditions have been fulfilled, I assert most categorically that music will call happy, melancholy tears to your eyes.

It goes without saying that there is no recipe which would be good for everybody in the same pedantically rigid form. You may need a cigar, I — a cigarette; you may pant for pink silk, I — for green. Details must be worked out by each one of us on the basis of self-analysis and careful self-observation.

My last advice is: do not be afraid of *creating*, of *improvising*, of displaying *your own* taste and inventiveness. " Each one of us," Schopenhauer maintained, " can *take* from art exactly as much as he can *give*." Disclose and display yourself; and the charms of " the theatre for oneself " will disclose themselves to you.

Now I could pass direct to my " dramatic samples." This would be, probably, the most logical thing to do, too. Yet logic is not always to be abided by. And I feel that a digression is needed.

Chapter II

IN THE COMMISSION OF EXPERTS

IT is only in happy dreams that, forgetting their posthumous duties, the dead reappear among us.

It is only in happy dreams that one encounters but obliging friends and no enemies.

It is only in happy dreams that one hears words of approval and encouragement even from those who usually calumniate, stigmatize and anathematize.

A happy dream is the gift, perhaps the only gift, with which Fate rewards honest seekers of truth, fearless divers for spiritual pearls, and perspiring bricklayers of philosophy for their heroic sufferings and sacrifices.

It is exactly such a dream that was granted to me by my God — Theatrarch — on the day when I definitely worked out and polished the last link of my "theatre for oneself" theory.

I dreamed that Arthur Schopenhauer, Leo Tolstoy, Nietzsche, T. Hoffmann, Oscar Wilde, Leonid Andreyev and Henri Bergson gathered one night in my apartment.

They came upon an invitation by which I had requested them to honour me with their presence in order to discuss, in an informal conference, my ideas of the theatre in life, of "the theatre for oneself," etc. They all entered my

NOTE: The illustrations in this chapter are by N. I. Kulbin.

study with such charming modesty and simplicity and with such readiness to help me with their authoritative advice that I . . . virtually believed in their reality, as though there were nothing supernatural in it. (I am not a positivist, and things supernatural do not shock me at all.) You will, of course, understand that at first I felt rather embarrassed (one doesn't receive such distinguished guests every night); yet I soon regained my self-control, introduced them to one another, bade them sit down and make themselves comfortable, and offered them cigarettes, tea and biscuits. Then, having exchanged with them for the sake of politeness a couple of commonplace banalities (I do not remember to whom exactly I addressed my courteous questions), I switched the conversation by a skilful move to the main subject of our conference.

True to my old predilection for things theatrical, I will impart to the reader in dramatic form the conversations that followed. I must add for the sake of historical accuracy that, putting these conversations on paper, I found myself obliged to edit and rewrite some of them. In order to make them more concise and more to the point, I took the liberty of not only cutting certain passages, but also of developing and stressing certain others.

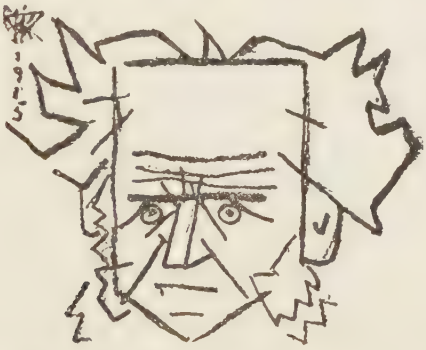
Here is, then, the highly authoritative *colloquium* on my ideas as faithfully recorded and liberally edited by me.

I remember very well that my first request to say a few words on the subject of our conference was addressed to Schopenhauer. The aged philosopher did not make us wait; he got up with a most engaging readiness and began to expound his weighty views. Let it be added that

throughout our *colloquium* he was very communicative, courteous and obliging. Readers will permit me to profit by this occasion in order to express to him in these lines my sincerest thankfulness and appreciation.

SCHOPENHAUER

Speaking of " the theatre for oneself," I should like to draw your attention to the fact that man is perfectly right when he chooses *art* as the medium for the expression of his idea, or ideas. It is true that art shows us the same things as we behold in the deceitful world of phenomena;



yet it shows them with more precision, in a more concise form and in brighter colours. In other words, art may be justly called the quintessence of life. The artist is attracted by the spectacle of objectivization of the Will; he contemplates it, he is carried away by it and he pictures it in his works. His creative imagination, so to speak, *stages this spectacle at its own expense, and it plays simultaneously the rôle of a producer and of a spectator.* (*A short pause.*) If " the world as idea " is but a visible image of the Will

which lies in its substance, art is the best interpretation of this image. It may be likened to the play within the play, to the stage on the stage, in "Hamlet." You may call it also, if you choose, "the theatre for oneself"! As though he were not sufficiently burdened with cares, troubles and duties thrust upon him by the world of realities, man creates for himself also an imaginary world of illusions and spends in it most lavishly his strength and his energy whenever he has an hour to spare. It is truly remarkable, nay, astonishingly remarkable, that alongside his life *in concreto*, he should always live a life *in abstracto*.

EVREINOFF

Yes, exactly, that's it! And the thing I should like to do is to bring some sort of order into this "other life," make it bear its gorgeous fruit! I mean the materialization . . .

SCHOPENHAUER (*laughing*)

You should remember that one who indulges in such play of imagination is a dreamer: he runs the risk of confusing the illusions with which he pleases to amuse himself with facts of real life. And you will understand that if this happens he will become a wretched romancer disqualified for this world!

EVREINOFF

First of all, this is not so very terrible; besides, I haven't lost hope that . . .

SCHOPENHAUER (*interrupting*)

The hope is, as Plato put it, the dream of man when he is awake, for its substance lies in that the Will makes the intellect, its servant, represent man's desires in the form of images. These desires have not yet materialized, but, never mind! the intellect clothes them in the garments of reality. It thus plays the rôle of a nurse who amuses the child with her fairy-tales, with fairy-tales which sound like truth. Yes, if you believe in Plato, never lose your hopes, never!

OSCAR WILDE (*adjusting his button-hole*)

Plato was charming.

NIETZSCHE (*caustically*)

Oh, this *Dionysiokolax* preoccupied with the *mise-en-scène* of his own self!

OSCAR WILDE

Whom do you call so? Me?

NIETZSCHE

Plato. Passionate, but heartless, theatricality and insincerity — such were the main characteristics of the Greeks and of their philosophers, including Plato. It isn't for nothing that his favourite literary form was the dramatic dialogue!

OSCAR WILDE

Yes, but was Plato not charming as a *Dionysiokolax?* (*Lights a cigarette.*)

EVREINOFF

Undoubtedly! In any case, as a *Dionysiokolax* Plato was infinitely more charming than as a philosopher who anticipated . . . (*bending to Schopenhauer*) *Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt?*

SCHOPENHAUER (*laughing and glancing at Nietzsche*)

Certainly! *Pereant, pereant!*

EVREINOFF (*coming back to the subject*)

Well, it has, then, been agreed that my "insanity," if "disqualification for this world" is really insanity, is not at all so terrible?

SCHOPENHAUER (*jocularly*)

Certainly not. Quite the contrary: such insanity may be even an enviable state of mind, for there is spiritual kinship between an insane person and a genius: both live in an entirely different world from the rest of the people.

EVREINOFF

This sounds encouraging indeed. Our famous Russian poet Balmont is of the same opinion. He says: "To lose one's mind is great, to have no mind is dreadful."

SCHOPENHAUER

Excellent. You shouldn't forget, however, that one may be neither a genius nor a madman, but merely . . .

EVREINOFF

But merely — what?

SCHOPENHAUER

An actor playing the rôle of a genius or a madman.

EVREINOFF

You do not approve of such " acting "?

SCHOPENHAUER

I did not mean to say that at all! Yet it is truly remarkable that the largest per cent of madmen should be recruited precisely among actors. Always to forget oneself and to transform oneself into others is a dangerous occupation. No wonder that it should often lead to the insane asylum.

EVREINOFF

Yes, but " All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." . . .

SCHOPENHAUER

This is, of course, true. No matter who he may be at bottom, man always finds himself obliged to play the rôle

which Fate has assigned to him by placing him in certain social, economic and other conditions. "All the world's a stage. . . ." How true is it indeed! Even in the realm of reflection and concentration man is a spectator, a theatrical spectator. He withdraws to this realm as an actor who has pronounced his monologue withdraws from the stage and, mixing with the spectators, beholds with serenity all that which is taking place on the boards, even if this be preparations for his own death and funeral. Yet the hour strikes, and he reappears on the stage to act, suffer or laugh again. . . . Yes, the world is a theatre.

EVREINOFF

And the theatre is the "*world as will and idea*"?

NIETZSCHE
OSCAR WILDE } (*laugh*)
HOFFMANN

SCHOPENHAUER (*frowning*)

Well, well! you have twisted it around like a real actor! . . .

NIETZSCHE (*to Schopenhauer*)

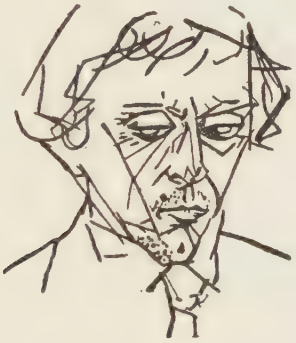
Why don't you resort to your eristic?

EVREINOFF (*smiling guiltily after his escapade*)

Teacher, I apologize for having interrupted you.

SCHOPENHAUER

Your youth and quick-mindedness make me accept your apology. Besides I must add that, though professionally theatrical, your idea is far from being absurd. As I have said . . .



EVREINOFF

The world is a theatre.

SCHOPENHAUER

Yes, exactly. Consider this, for example: on the stage, one actor plays a prince; another, a courtier; still another, a servant, or a soldier, or a general, etc. Yet, notwithstanding these accidental distinctions, we find the same substance in each of these cases — the poor player with his sorrows and needs. *It is the same way in life.* The end of man's life makes me think of the end of a masquerade when its participants drop their masks. It is only at this moment that man gets a glimpse of their real faces, of

their true selves; and he comes to realize that, when he was a child, life appeared to him as amusing decorations seen from afar, while in his last hour it appears to him as the same old decorations beheld at the point-blank range. In his old age, when the sexual instinct has died away, man's life reminds me of a comedy the beginning of which was played by a live being, and the end of which is being played by an automaton wearing this being's garments. Nay, the whole of mankind appears to me at times as a variety of marionettes set in motion by the elaborate fabric of a watch-mechanism.

EVREINOFF

This watch-mechanism being "the will to life"?

SCHOPENHAUER

Certainly.

EVREINOFF

Didn't we come a few minutes ago to the conclusion that life is a theatre?

SCHOPENHAUER

Yes, we did.

EVREINOFF

Ergo, we are marionettes set in motion by "the will to the theatre"?

SCHOPENHAUER

Yes, perhaps. I think you can put it that way.

EVREINOFF

What a queer truth!

SCHOPENHAUER

Here is for you, if you are fond of comparisons, a still queerer truth: the world compares best of all with the plays of Gozzi. You know that in all his plays there figure the same persons prompted in their deeds by the same desires and obeying the same dictates of Fate. Of course, the plot and the situations are different in each play, but the general atmosphere remains the same in all of them. The characters of one play do not know anything of other plays in spite of the fact that they all have participated in them. It is for this reason that the accumulated experience of all these plays has not cured Pantalone of his clumsiness and stinginess, Tarthalius of his dishonesty, Brigella of her indecision, and Colombina of her frivolity.

HOFFMANN

Bravo, bravo!

SCHOPENHAUER (*in a spirited voice*)

" All the world's a stage. . . ." It is to the author of these words that you should say " bravo "!

OSCAR WILDE

Shakespeare is not by any means a flawless artist. He is too fond of going directly to life and borrowing life's

utterance. He forgets that when Art surrenders her imaginative medium she surrenders everything.

LEO TOLSTOY (*indignantly to Leonid Andreyev*)

What an idiotic statement! How dares he!?

SCHOPENHAUER

Let me repeat that it is to Shakespeare as the author of this wonderful comparison that we should say "bravo." For, indeed, man's life is, in its broad lines and in its essential phases, always a tragedy. But in its details, in the intricacies of its daily cares, it is rather a comedy. Petty fears and worries, the expectations and fears of every week and hour, the luring temptations of the playful and sarcastic chance, all this reminds one of scenes from a comical play. But our loftiest longings never materialize, our fondest hopes are shattered by the pitiless Fate, and we grow old only to realize the irreparable mistakes by which we have crippled our lives. And on the last page we read, to the accompaniment of the culminating grief and sorrow, the concluding word, "death." Yes, this is a tragedy. But we do not even have the morbid joy of wading through this tragedy with the dignity of tragical characters: as though wishing to poison our sufferings with a scornful joke, Fate has made us figure in it as ridiculous and invariably banal clowns.

HOFFMANN (*taken aback*)

Why "ridiculous and invariably banal"?

EVREINOFF (*trying to quash the question of "invariable banality"*)

Before Shakespeare life was likened to the theatre by Erasmus of Rotterdam and, before Erasmus, by Marcus Aurelius.

SCHOPENHAUER

Yes, but Shakespeare did it better than anyone else. . . .

EVREINOFF (*politely*)

Except you!

SCHOPENHAUER (*with feigned modesty*)

Thank you, but I do not think so. I have a predilection for genuine works of art which speak to us not in cold and dry abstractions of philosophic works, but in the *naïve and childish language of direct perceptions, of flitting images.*

EVREINOFF

If so, dear teacher, you should bestow your blessing upon my art of "the theatre for oneself."

SCHOPENHAUER (*laughs*)

In spite of all your childishness you certainly do not lack a certain dialectical skill.

EVREINOFF

Didn't my teacher say that "childishness is characteristic of geniuses"?

SCHOPENHAUER (*flattered by this quotation from his works*)

You have a good memory!

EVREINOFF

Thank you.

SCHOPENHAUER

I believe that I was right when I said it. Of course, a genius is always a grown-up child. Suffice it to say that he *regards the world as a spectacle, as a show.* Add to this an irresistible fondness for eyesight impressions, for spontaneous images and for monologues!

EVREINOFF

I feel flattered, though I probably look ridiculous in my childishness!

SCHOPENHAUER

Perhaps. But do we not look ridiculous when we take the world of realities too much in earnest?

EVREINOFF

Yes, teacher, we certainly do.

NIETZSCHE (*thoughtfully*)

To become a mature man means to reacquire that seriousness which one possessed in childhood, while playing.

SCHOPENHAUER (*paying no attention to Nietzsche's words*)

Only "simple mortals" are completely satisfied with matter-of-fact realities, which are such a terribly serious thing to them. Is it not for this reason that the great majority of men live lives which, viewed from without, seem to be senselessly meaningless and, felt from within, appear as boresomely dull? What a chasm between such men, on the one hand, and a genius, on the other! Yes, reality cannot satisfy a genius, because his mind is too wide to be filled by it to the brim! A genius does not trust reality; he trusts his own fantasy, which expands his outlook far beyond the things he sees around him.

EVREINOFF

Don't you think that, to a certain extent, this is true also of "simple mortals"? Instead of obeying the dry arguments of his reason, man always obeys, in the last account, the attractive illusions by which his wishes and imagination tempt him. Unless I am very much mistaken, I hold this thought from your own works, dear teacher.

SCHOPENHAUER

True. But there is an unbridgeable difference between the imagination of a genius and that of a "simple mortal."

EVREINOFF

I understand. Now tell us, teacher, what do you think of my idea of using fantasy and imagination as instruments of " the theatre for oneself "?

SCHOPENHAUER (*evasively*)

Well . . . you know that an intelligent man will never be bored by loneliness. He will find distraction and amusement in his own thoughts and *imagination,* while a fool . . . hm . . . It must be admitted that the happiest countries are those which can get along and prosper with the least possible quantity of imported goods, or, what is still better, with no imported goods at all. The same applies to your " theatre for oneself ": only those will be happy in it who possess a wealth of their own spiritual treasures and who *require but an insignificant amount of impressions from without.* The " importation " of impressions is always a costly and a dangerous policy: it renders us dependent upon the reality, it transforms us into its slaves, it exposes us to numberless adversities and it gives us but unsatisfactory substitutes which cannot replace the treasures that might be obtained through a wise and efficient exploitation of our own natural resources.

EVREINOFF

You are referring to the public theatre?

SCHOPENHAUER

No, my idea is wider. I mean to say that we should not expect much from *others* and that, generally speaking, the human soul cannot get much *from without.* Meanwhile *people do need "circenses."*

EVREINOFF

If so, you are certainly a supporter of the "theatre for oneself" theory.

SCHOPENHAUER

My young friend, I must tell you that you are too self-asserting in your attempts at recruiting allies and supporters. Yet, though not persuaded to enlist, I will admit this: according to your idea, the "plays" of "the theatre for oneself" should be created by spontaneous effort, as it were, by divine inspiration; all such works of art possess the great quality of being pure and sincere fragments of our creative enthusiasm, of our subconscious self, of our genius. They are free from the alloy of analysis or of deliberate tendency. It is for this reason that they are, so to speak, saturated with joy and delight and that we enjoy them in their entirety, in their homogeneous sincerity. However insignificant, *they may have a stronger appeal and be more convincing than the greatest works of art* executed through years of sustained effort.

EVREINOFF (*seizing and shaking with hot, trembling hands the cold hand of Schopenhauer*)

Thank you, teacher.

SCHOPENHAUER

I envy you, young man, for happy are those who are still dreaming of something, who can still be carried away by some idea. Our life is a continuous race from a desire to its satisfaction, then to a new desire, and after it has been satisfied, to yet other desires and satisfactions; if this race goes on in lively, quick tempo we call it happiness, and if the tempo is slow we describe it as suffering. Woe to us when it comes to an end, when we have no more desires to keep us moving, for a life-killing boredom, an ice-cold and desperate languor sets in then. Indeed, suffering and boredom — such are the poles of the axis around which every human life revolves! Life as such is always a suffering. Yet, if we regard this suffering as a *spectacle*, we shall be bound to admit that it is a majestic and edifying spectacle.

EVREINOFF (*enthusiastically*)

Long live "the theatre for oneself"!

SCHOPENHAUER

Well . . . "Long live its scientific investigation!" I should rather say. To attain true wisdom one does not need to gauge and fathom the boundless universe; one

needs to investigate to the bottom some little part of it. If this be true you certainly deserve our congratulations. Yes. I hope, too, that you will appreciate my reluctance to frustrate with the exacting criticism of old age the ardour of your youthful efforts! . . . We, pessimists, incorrigible pess . . .

NIETZSCHE (*interrupting*)

This man has a nerve to call himself a pessimist! Look at this " pessimist " denying the existence of all Divinity, repudiating the world and . . . gratifying himself with the sounds of the flute! Yes, gentlemen, read his biographies, and you will see that I am not exaggerating: he actually does play the flute every day after dinner. And you dare call this pessimism?

SCHOPENHAUER (*imperturbably*)

If nonsensicalities which we hear from our interlocutors begin to irritate us, we should imagine ourselves in a theatre beholding a comical quarrel of two fools. This is the best means not to lose one's temper.

NIETZSCHE

The flute-player is trying to get witty! *Vivat comoedia!* . . . No, I will never forgive myself for having worshipped in my early years his hypocritical philosophy!

EVREINOFF

Excuse me, gentlemen, I believe . . .

NIETZSCHE (*paying no attention to him*)

There exists such a thing as wrathful loquacity. Examples of it may be found in the writings of Luther; but a real past-master of it is Schopenhauer! . . .

EVREINOFF

Gentlemen, we are off the subject!

NIETZSCHE

Not at all. The thing I have in mind just now is the *psychology of the actor.* I always think of it when a philosopher loses, in my presence, his philosophic humour and lets himself be carried away by a silly moral indignation. All these " sufferings " of Schopenhauer, his " self-sacrifice on the altar of Truth," — what a wealth of feelings is concealed behind this pose! Watching him and listening to him, I realize what an *actor* he is!

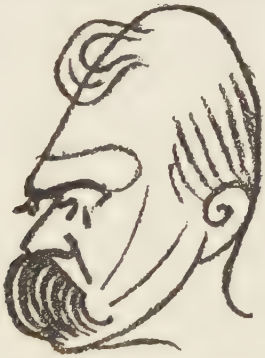
SCHOPENHAUER (*à part*)

Si tacuisses — philosophus manisses! . . .

NIETZSCHE

I want you to know that the problem of " actorship " has always interested me immensely. Whole-heartedly sincere lying; a violent desire to assume poses and to feign most dissimilar moods which at times flares up into a passion submerging man's real " self "; an infinite variety of adaptative colourings and disguises which are often used

with no immediate, selfish purpose; — all this bespeaks something more than mere "actorship," than simple theatricality. It is an instinct which enables man "to put on a special cloak for each wind," which becomes itself a sort of "cloak" and which is a fine sample of the hide-and-seek play called *mimicry* in the animal kingdom. Take, for example, the Jewish people, who possess the talent of adaptation *par excellence* and who might be regarded *a priori* as an inexhaustible source of actors. Indeed, could



you name a good contemporary actor who is not a Jew? Mankind has hitherto been too short-sighted to understand that the most powerful men in history have always been actors and that the most stormy and interesting periods of history have always been dominated by actors, by all imaginable actors! Therefore, gentlemen, respect actors! And to see the very best of them, do not go to theatres! Remember that our own face is the best mask we can put on! A deep mind always needs a mask! Gods have the habit of appearing to us behind veils and covers. Significant truths reveal themselves in masks!

SCHOPENHAUER (*losing his temper*)

My young friend, you have gone too far! . . . It is true that man has the inborn talent of using his face as a mask expressing with perfect accuracy that which he wants it to express at any given moment. This mask, made, as it were, to special order for his individuality, fits him so well and is so flexible and rich in expressions that spectators can be easily duped by it. But in order to reflect a feigned mood it must be controlled with utmost vigilance by his mind. You will admit that to wear thus "a mask" for a long time is exceedingly difficult. "*Nemo potest personam diu ferre fictam,*" Seneca says in his *De Clementia.* Moreover, I must add that feigned expressions and other such mimic deceits are morally justifiable only when they serve a lofty end, when they are used to combat crime, to straighten out injustice, to avert suffering, etc. You remember Ariosto's verses:

"Quantunque il simular sia le più volte
Ripreso e dia mala mente indici,
Si trova pure in molte cose e molte
Avere fatti enoidenti benefici
E danni e biasmi e morti avere tolte."

For instance, my young friend, I will tell you that the wearing of a moustache like yours, of a moustache which covers half the face and can be used as a real mask, should be strictly prohibited by the police. I am not going to speak of the fact that, as man's sexual distinction impudently sticking out in the middle of the face, such a moustache is preposterously indecent . . .

NIETZSCHE (*interrupting and addressing the rest of the gathering*)

Do you hear that? Now tell me whether I wasn't right when I spoke of the stupidity of "moral indignation"! To become personal and to adduce the police as an argument in a discussion — only Schopenhauer can do such things! His "morals" have already prompted him once to preach bodily punishment for duels, and I am sure that, if he could have his own way, he would throw me without a moment's hesitation into a prison cell and inflict upon me the most terrible "Chinese tortures" for the knightly scar which adorns the "middle of my face," for this noble trace of a duel which I am proud to preserve since my university days!

SCHOPENHAUER

I know that you would prefer to escape the retribution and the punishment which await you for the preaching of false opinions!

NIETZSCHE

A false opinion is not necessarily an insignificant or unimportant opinion! This is, perhaps, one of the most astonishing paradoxes the world has ever heard. An opinion is valuable to mankind if it helps it in the process of life, if it satisfies fundamental requirements of life, if it educates the human race. Now I will tell you that it is exactly the admittedly false judgments (for instance, the synthetic judgments *a priori*) that fall into this category and are of the greatest use to us. I maintain that man

wouldn't be able to live without resorting to logical falsehoods, without orientating himself in this constantly changing world of realities by means of purely imaginary standards and notions such as the "absolute," the "immutable," etc., and without falsifying living facts with dead mathematical figures. To repudiate false conceptions and opinions would mean to repudiate life and to invoke death. Few will dare to recognize falsehood and lies as *sine qua non* conditions of life, for this would naturally entail a thorough revaluation of all accepted, commonplace values; moreover, a philosophic system built on such premises would unavoidably take the dangerous path leading beyond the bounds of good and evil. Yet, it would be childish not to admit that mankind thrives by the lie, is greatly indebted to the lie and should bow to the lie. Attempts at "hiding" from this unpleasant truth would bespeak a miserable mental cowardice. Don't forget that even when he is afflicted by some tragedy, man usually invents three-quarters of this tragedy himself, that is to say, lies to himself. Yes, in lies we were born and in lies we will die. Or, putting it in virtuous and hypocritical terms, we are all natural fiction-writers, though we may not know it.

OSCAR WILDE

Excuse me, sir, but one may conclude from what you have been saying that you have learned by heart my article entitled "The Decay of Lying."

NIETZSCHE

I have never read that article.

OSCAR WILDE

Really? What a strange coincidence! (*Turning to the others*) Gentlemen, judge for yourselves! Did I not say in that article that "Society sooner or later must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fascinating liar"? Did I not predict that "when that day comes . . . facts will be regarded as discreditable, Truth will be found mourning over her fetters, and Romance, with her temper of wonder, will return to the land"? Did I not add that "what we have to do, what at any rate it is our duty to do, is to revive this old art of Lying"? One can also learn from this article of mine that "Lying, that is to say, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art," and that "the mask is always infinitely more suggestive than the face it covers." Does this not lead one to believe that Mr. . . . Nietzsche (is that the gentleman's name? has sheltered his philosophy under the roof of my house?

NIETZSCHE (*with contempt*)

"I always live in my own home.
I have never emulated any thinker,
And I have made fun of all those
Who did not make fun of themselves"

— these words were inscribed as my motto over the entrance of my house.

OSCAR WILDE

I wrote over the door of my library the word " Whim."

NIETZSCHE

This was done before you by Emerson. I see that you are hopelessly in love with sonorous words and that your effeminate feet feel safe only on the carpet of lies. You snob!

EVREINOFF (*trying to settle the conflict by a joke*)

By the way, this 53rd aphorism of yours sounds to us Russians as a very funny pun: the words " on the carpet " (*po kovru*) are phonetically equivalent in our language to the words " as long as I am lying " (*poka vru*). Isn't that funny? (*Laughs with feigned merriment.*)

OSCAR WILDE

I cannot laugh in the society of men who dare to profane the idea of Lying and to turn it most uncourteously against its author!

NIETZSCHE

This sounds like a confession. . . .

EVREINOFF

Gentlemen, do not get excited! Cool off, I implore you. Don't you remember with what touching solidarity you died in 1900, one immediately after the other? When

this happened one could believe that mutual respect and friendship prompted you to withdraw from our world simultaneously. Do not quarrel!

NIETZSCHE

What? friendship with an unknown snob?

OSCAR WILDE

How dares he? I — "unknown"?

LEO TOLSTOY (*to Leonid Andreyev*)

Even I, with all my "backwardness," know who this depraved aesthete is. He has the impudence to extol in his works vice and immorality.

EVREINOFF

Gentlemen, allow me to tell you that the idea of the acceptance of the world through Art, and of Art through the Lie, was *in pendente* at the time when you lived. This suffices to prove that both of you were perfectly original and that neither of you could be accused of plagiarism! (*Whispers, bending to Wilde*) Give in, you are the younger! (*Whispers, bending to Nietzsche*) Give in, you are the older!

NIETZSCHE (*low*)

Well, after all I am not afraid of pickpockets. Nor is it of pickpockets that Zarathustra spoke to men. (*While Evreinoff bends to Nietzsche and requests him to express*

in a more detailed way his opinion of "the theatre for oneself," Leo Tolstoy and Leonid Andreyev exchange views on the just terminated discussion.)

LEO TOLSTOY

Who of the two was the first to extol the lie — to discuss that and to quarrel over that! Aren't they ashamed? As if there were no greater virtues to boast of!

LEONID ANDREYEV

Well, Leo Nicolayevich, I do not quite agree with you. I am of the opinion that a disinterested and unselfish passion for lying is not a vice: it often turns out to be the germ of literary talent.

LEO TOLSTOY

Oh, don't you say that!

EVREINOFF (*announces in an official manner*)

Gentlemen, my highly esteemed guest, Frederick Nietzsche, has kindly agreed to express his opinion on the phenomenon which I define as "the theatre for oneself." (*To Nietzsche, with a bow*) Please!

NIETZSCHE

All right! I will begin by expressing my deep gratitude to those who serve the cause of the theatre. Thanks to their noble efforts, we can behold on the stage personified expressions of our own selves, of our own wishes, fears and

desires. They teach us to perceive and to respect a hero concealed in every average man, they enable us to look at ourselves from aloof and afar, as we would look at theatrical heroes, and they show us our own selves in a transfigured and ennobled form. In other words, they teach us to "stage" our own selves on theatrical boards. It is from the summit of these thoughts that I will greet your idea of "the theatre for oneself." Indeed, in man's soul the creator and the creation are fused together. There are in man's soul rich supplies of material, numbers of unused fragments and splinters, deposits of clay, mud, insanity and chaos; yet there resides in it also the creator, the sculptor, the divine artist armed with an unbending will and with the life-giving chisel. What do I care about the drama, about the banal ecstasies of cheap players, about the hocus-pocus of elaborate stage settings and gestures! I know that when people go to the theatre they leave their individualities at home. They give up their tastes and opinions, their predilections and ideas, even the courage which they possess within the walls of their dwellings. No one takes to the theatre the most refined elements of one's self. Men, women, thinkers, traders, all fuse in the theatre into a homogeneous, hypocritical, democratic and vulgar crowd, into a herd. Now you will understand that I am an essentially anti-theatrical being, a living antithesis to men like Richard Wagner, that born player and comedian, that actor from head to toe, who was, at that, a musician. . . . No! . . . One who counts in one's soul a sufficient number of comedies and tragedies will certainly choose not to visit theatres! Or, if he happens to go to a

theatre, all, including the actors, the play, the public and the ushers, will appear to him as *his own tragedy and comedy*, no matter what the playwright's idea has been! If I understand correctly your "theatre for oneself," *it is the theatre of an ascetic*, for the ascetic strives to preserve in its purity and integrity the divine grain of life threatened by the crowd. Does this characteristic not apply to you as the author of the "theatre for oneself" theory?

EVREINOFF (*modestly*)

Of this, Maestro, you can be a better judge than I.

NIETZSCHE

However it may be, I am glad to acclaim the idea of "the theatre for oneself." And it is a pleasure for me to learn that this idea was born in Russia, in that great central State where Europe fuses with Asia, where enormous reserves of creative will and power have been accumulated, and where grandiose, titanic storms are ripening. I bow to Russia as a disciple of Dostoyevsky and as a Slav belonging to the glorious family of the Counts Nitzky. For it is not my fault that I was born in that cursed "German plain," or "platitude."

EVREINOFF (*theatrically*)

Thank you for Russia and for myself.

OSCAR WILDE (*looking ironically at Evreinoff*)

If you are looking for further encouragement, here are a few ideas for you. — It seems to me, first of all, that one does not need to share the ascetic ideal of Mr. Nietzsche in order to admit that imagination unavoidably spreads solitude around it, for it is only in solitude and silence that it can bear its fruit. Greek gods live thus: they either meditated over their own perfection, or contemplated with perfect serenity the tragi-comedy of the world which

they had themselves created. We should follow their example. It is very much more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it. Action is a base concession to the fact. We could give up action and become more spiritual, surrender energy and attain perfection. It often seems to me that Browning felt that way. Indeed, he could have created a Hamlet fulfilling his mission in imagination. Real events and happenings were to Browning immaterial and unreal. Action was in his opinion the only undramatic

element of dramatic works. "The theatre for oneself," you say? Why not? Art does not depend upon professionals, it depends upon artists. You are undoubtedly right in that a play can be artistically perfect only when it is written, produced and played by *one* person. This person, this true dramatist, will show us Life in the form of Art, but not Art in the form of Life. Life, or "the energy of Life," as Aristotle would say, is always seeking forms for self-expression, while Art supplies it with an infinite variety of such forms. For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, this is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness, of the man who looks at her. Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil. This pupil has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out very well.

EVREINOFF

Are you sure that she is a pupil of Art, precisely of Art?

OSCAR WILDE

I know, sir, that you dare to oppose my aesthetical principle with your "pre-aesthetical" principle of theatricality. I am not going to discuss that question, for I am not always

quite certain whether I really share my own opinions. It is rather the contrary — I do not share them at all. And how could it be otherwise? I have solved the riddle of Truth: a Truth in Art is that whose contradictory is also true. The Truths of metaphysics are the Truths of masks.

EVREINOFF

Cher maître, was not your life, taken as a whole, an excellent example of " the theatre for oneself "?

OSCAR WILDE

Of the theatre " for oneself " and for others as well. I have always maintained that man must be the poet of his own life. That is the only thing that is really of importance. For the much praised naturalness is, after all, but a pose. . . .

EVREINOFF

And an extremely difficult one, at that. In this every stage manager supervising the production of realistic plays will agree with you. You taught, *cher maître,* . . .

OSCAR WILDE

I taught men *to make of themselves works of Art.* Here, as elsewhere, practice must precede perfection. Let us begin with the Art of Lying. Many a young man starts in life with a natural gift for exaggeration which, if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful. . . .

EVREINOFF

But . . .

OSCAR WILDE

I know, you want to say that the Lie and Imagination may assume exaggerated, abnormal proportions. I am of the opinion that they unfortunately never attain sufficient proportions, not to speak of the abnormal ones.

NIETZSCHE

I revealed to the world long since that man has gradually become a *dreaming animal*, and that we should all *improvise* our days! To live — doesn't it mean to differ from Nature, to rise above it? — All this, my dear Mr. . . . Wilde (is that the gentleman's name?), was said by me simultaneously with you, if not before you!

OSCAR WILDE

Did you also say that men should make of themselves works of Art?

NIETZSCHE

Yes, I did.

EVREINOFF

It is in the 667th of his posthumous aphorisms that Mr. Nietzsche says: " Work on yourselves every day and hour as artists work on their masterpieces."

NIETZSCHE

Yes, that is my aphorism.

OSCAR WILDE

But a posthumous one!

EVREINOFF

It has been established that it was jotted down between 1882 and 1884.

OSCAR WILDE

At that time I was about thirty, and my aesthetic teachings had already astounded the world.

NIETZSCHE

I do not know what kind of "world" you mean, but if you mean cultured readers, they knew already in the seventies, from my "Merry Science," that our life is bearable and acceptable only as an "aesthetical phenomenon." They also learned from this work of mine that art gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. . . .

OSCAR WILDE

Impossible!

NIETZSCHE (*pitilessly*)

Moreover, my book revealed to the "world," as you please to put it, that, attaining the age of maturity, most Europeans mix up their rôles most desperately and become victims of their own convincingly realistic "acting." They forget that their choice of profession, station in life, etc., was decided by mere chance, by caprice of fate,

by trifling coincidences; yet, even if they remembered it, nothing would change, for their rôles have become their "second natures," and their dramatic tricks, their "second characters."

SCHOPENHAUER (*to Oscar Wilde*)

Here is a chance for you to repeat my favourite saying: "*Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt!*"

OSCAR WILDE

Now I understand what prompted me not to delay the enunciation of my ideas: it is from *me* that the world learned first that which had been said by others years before!

EVREINOFF

Gentlemen, accept my sincerest congratulations on this happy and amicable settlement of your dispute.

OSCAR WILDE (*to Nietzsche*)

Les beaux esprits se rencontrent.

EVREINOFF (*to Hoffmann*)

My dear Mr. Hoffmann! You have heard here a great deal on the power of Dream over Life, on the creative rôle of Fancy, on the precedence of Art over Nature and on the boundless authority exerted by man's imagination over reality. Doesn't it seem to you that all these ideas have

been forecast and foreshadowed by a certain follower of Callot whose names are Ernest, Theodor and Amadeus?

HOFFMANN

I feel flattered to hear my names in so distinguished a society.

EVREINOFF

For my part, I am glad to see the distinguished bearer of these names in my house.

HOFFMANN

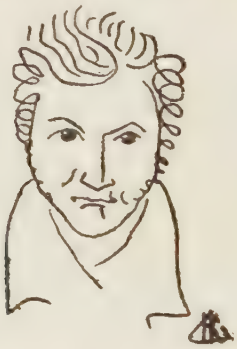
What makes you believe that I am really in your house? Why are you so sure that I am not strolling at the present moment along the shores of the Ganges? that I am not picking the fragrant flowers of India in order to prepare out of them a French tobacco for the nose of some mystical idol? that I am not plunging into the gloomy and terrible graves of Memphis with the purpose of getting from the oldest of the Pharaohs the little toe of his left foot which a proud princess from Argentina needs as a medicine against her ills? or that I am not sitting over the fountain of Urdar engaged in a long philosophical conversation with my old friend, the magician Ruffiamonthe?

EVREINOFF

Excuse me, please, my dear Mr. Hoffmann; I am not sure at all that you are really here; I meant to say, it *seems* to me that you are.

HOFFMANN

Well, that's different. Men always " presume " something, " believe " in something, " suppose," etc. This is just as natural for them as to attempt to overstep the bounds of this commonplace reality. Sancho Panza believed that God should reward most generously the fellow who invented sleep; yet, I think that a still more generous reward should be given to him who invented dreams. I do not mean dreams which arise in our soul only while



we lie motionless under the soft and warm cover of sleep; I mean the dreams which do not abandon us when we are awake, which accompany us from the days of our youth to our last hour, which often carry on their ethereal wings the unbearable burdens of our earthly existence, which dispel all tragedies and sufferings and which, descending into our soul from Heaven, fill it with happy hopes and golden aspirations. Oh, gentlemen! What a joy it is for me to learn that you share my predilection for dreams, and my contempt of reality! How happy I was to hear your wise

opinions! Indeed, what a wonderful world is concealed in man's soul! This world is limited by no solar system, and its treasures surpass all the unfathomed riches of our planet! How dull, miserably poor and colourless our life would be if the Spirit of the World had not provided our souls with these inexhaustible mines of sparkling and shining diamonds! Happy are those who feel the presence of these riches in their souls. Still happier are, however, those who know how to find and extract the glittering gems from these mines, who know how to shape, cut and polish them so as to make them shine still brighter and lighter. Indeed, one can but wish good luck to the author of the "theatre for oneself" theory, if this theatre really teaches men thus to exploit these riches. I am sure that everyone who is bored by the uninspiring matter-of-factness of life and who wishes to see dreams transformed into reality, and reality dismissed as a stupid nightmare, will follow my example in acclaiming Mr. Evreinoff's idea.

OSCAR WILDE

"Dreams into reality . . ."? One more "coincidence"! Indeed, nothing is more difficult than to be original! *Plus ça change — plus ça reste la même chose. . . .*

SCHOPENHAUER

Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.

EVREINOFF (*to Hoffmann*)

You mentioned not long ago the fountain of Urdar. I do not remember just now of what extraordinary curative properties of this fountain you had spoken in your works?

HOFFMANN

The fountain of Urdar, which has given happiness to the inhabitants of the country called Urdar-Garden, is nothing less than Humour, that is to say, the divine talent by which man creates in his thoughts his own ironical alter-ego. This talent has been acquired by man through the contemplation of Nature, for Nature also indulges in amusing herself with strange grimaces, with ironical, caricatural faces. "The theatre for oneself" might greatly profit by imbibing the life-giving water from this fountain!

EVREINOFF

Oh, that goes without saying!

HOFFMANN

The talisman from Chelionatti's antique shop which helps men to become tolerably good or even excellent actors might be also of use in this new institution of yours.

EVREINOFF

Most certainly!

HOFFMANN

Yes, " the theatre for oneself " won't be able to do without the actor! But it won't be difficult to be the actor in this theatre: an expressive voice will suffice even if there are no other assets. It goes without saying that an expressive voice is a very, very important thing. By the way, this reminds me of a letter which was received by my illustrious compatriot, Louis Tieck, the author of the unsurpassed " Phantasus." If you do not remember the contents of this document, which has often been quoted by historians of the theatre, I will quote it to you. " *Germany's best theatre,*" Tieck's correspondent wrote to him, " *is to be found in your room, by your round table lit by two candles* — a third candle would be of no use. *Everything is here — the ensemble, the unity of style, harmony, inspiration, humour, in a word, all one could expect from a theatre.*" ..... Thus, you see that Tieck could do very well even without that ideally submissive cast which can be preserved, while it is not needed on the stage, in a spacious trunk, and which is probably familiar to you from my " Unusual Sufferings of a Theatrical Director."

EVREINOFF

By the way, the Russian public know hardly anything about Tieck. I believe that in France, England or America his name is also an empty sound.

HOFFMANN

Yet, long before the "discoveries" of your much-praised theatrical reformers, Tieck had laid bare the defects and shortcomings of the contemporary public theatre — yes, do not smile, of the *contemporary* one, for his ideas are just as fresh to-day as they were a century ago. Some of them may be of interest to you as the creator of "the theatre for oneself." Thus, Tieck regarded "the sharp division between the stage and the audience as essentially anti-artistic; the theatre looks like a building a part of which has been chopped off." Tieck also criticized the numberless inconsistencies which are perceived in the theatre by each one of us: the disproportion between the actor and the decorations, the senselessness of the attempt at rendering decorations artistically valuable in themselves, the perspectivelessness of things seen on the stage, the false glare of footlights, etc.

EVREINOFF

My dear Mr. Hoffmann, all these ideas were expounded at the beginning of the nineteenth century by various other authors as something very new and fashionable.

HOFFMANN

Yes, but the first one to expound them was Louis Tieck. Reread his "Dramatic Leaflets" and you will see that he was a real forerunner of all modern and contemporary stage reformers.

EVREINOFF

Why, then, was Tieck's name passed over in silence by all our leading stage managers? This, I am sure, must be ascribed to their crass ignorance. For I would never admit that they are so immoral as to sell other people's belongings as their own.

HOFFMANN

Your opinions are remarkably humanitarian, which is praiseworthy in a young man like you. Of course, true virtue requires no reward; yet I will reward you for your humanitarianism by telling you that Tieck would acclaim your "theatre for oneself" most enthusiastically if he were here among us. Indeed, he maintained that the theatre should be cosy and comfortable above all. He expressed his enlightened opinion to this effect in the following words (I am sure that my memory will allow me to quote them without inaccuracies): "The height and the width of a theatre may ruin the effect of the most convincing acting of excellent players: in such a theatre the spectator may lack the comfortable feeling of pleasant cosiness, and it should be remembered that no aesthetic enjoyment is possible without this feeling."

EVREINOFF

I feel it my duty to honour and salute the memory of Tieck and . . . Hoffmann. (*Gets up three times in succession, while Hoffmann laughs with a ghost-like laughter.*)

TIECK'S GHOST (*shining forth through the front wall and speaking with the voice of Hamlet's father*)

Blessed be the gathering which abides by the rule "*de mortuis aut bene aut nihil!*" (*Bows theatrically and vanishes.*)

EVREINOFF (*turning, after a short pause, to Leo Tolstoy*)

Dear Leo Nicolayevich! I needn't tell you how much we are all interested in your opinion on "the theatre for oneself": you know very well with what impatience we are waiting to hear you. I will tell you frankly that my anxiety to learn your views is mixed with embarrassment and fear: Shakespeare himself could not stand the sting of your critical acumen; if so, how should I not tremble?

LEO TOLSTOY (*smiling good-naturedly*)

Don't be afraid; I won't be exacting. Of course your theatre is not a "catholic" theatre; yet I like it better than the public theatres which — one shrinks with horror at the thought! — cost our government millions of roubles and which keep thousands of labourers working and toiling day and night. And all these sacrifices are made to keep up an *immoral art* which *kills brotherly love among men!* Besides, even the lovers and defenders of this art, and of arts in general, differ in opinion as to what is art, what kind of art is moral and useful, what is the moral purpose of art, etc. Thus men do not know on what they are spending money and sacrificing the efforts of their

fellow-men! After having visited such theatres as, for instance, the Conservatoire of Moscow, where, as you know, Anton Rubinstein's " Phermamos " was performed, I . . .

EVREINOFF

Oh, yes, I remember! Besides having read it in your works, I have heard it from a certain Miss Hirschfeld (I remember her by her maiden name) who, as a member of the chorus which sang in that play, had become herself a victim of the customary cursing and swearing of stage managers which you have so excellently described in . . .

LEO TOLSTOY

So you have met her? Well, tell me how she felt about it. Did she like it when the stage manager called her a " cow," or a " pig," and shouted at her as skippers shout at young, inexperienced sailors?

EVREINOFF

No, she didn't like it at all, but she tried to reconcile herself to it, because it was, in her opinion, a general rule. . . .

LEO TOLSTOY

I see, — tried to reconcile herself. But what for? What made her suffer these abuses? The fact is that, analysing the essence of theatrical spectacles, one cannot make out for what sort of public they are intended. An

educated person looks at these base things with boredom and disgust, while a real workman or peasant does not understand a word of them. Who, then, can enjoy that sort of thing? Young lackeys and depraved proletarians who are trying to show off their "education" and their "culturedness." And all these harmful and stupid theatrical goods, all these plays and shows, are produced at the price of hatred, bestial cruelty, tears and sufferings. Just think of the fact that ballet, circus, opera, operetta and the

like require strenuous efforts of thousands of persons working often under unhealthy or humiliating conditions! It would be perfectly all right if artists, composers, etc., carried out their conceptions by their own strengths and efforts. Unfortunately it's never the case. Artists always need the labour of working people, not only for aesthetic ends, but also for their luxurious living. And they get this labour in the guise of money given to them by wealthy people, in the guise of subventions granted to them by the government for the organization of theatres, conservatories, museums, etc. But how dare we forget that this

money has been squeezed out of the common people, who never go to the theatres, who never profit by museums! They have a theatre of their own and an art of their own! . . . We are accustomed to understand by "art" only what we read, hear and see in theatres, art-galleries, museums, concerts, exhibitions. Books, poems, statues, buildings — such are, in our opinion, things appertaining to art. This is, however, but an insignificant part, an infinitesimal fragment of art which permeates our lives. Art is infinitely wider than this artificial conception of it. Man's life is filled, from beginning to end, with products of art; a lullaby, a joke, an attempt to imitate the pose of a playmate, the desire to adorn one's dwelling, the beautification of oneself by all sort of costumes and cosmetics, the contemplation of church services, of solemn processions, etc., — do not all these things belong to art? Are they not displays of artistic instincts?

EVREINOFF

They certainly are. And this form of art can be best defined as "the theatre for oneself."

LEO TOLSTOY

Call it what you like. The thing that matters is that it is real, genuine, good art. I will give you an example. Once I was returning home, after a walk, with very pessimistic thoughts on my mind. As I came near the manor I heard the singing of a great many female voices: our peasant women were welcoming and congratulating my

daughter, who had just been married. There was so much joy, merriment, courage and energy in this singing accompanied by cheerful outcries and by the beating of scythes, that I forgot my melancholy and entered the court-yard in the merriest and most cheerful of moods. On the same day a famous musician came to us on a short visit and played in the evening a sonata by Beethoven. (Beethoven and other classics are considered his specialty.) When he finished, the listeners, as is always done in such cases, expressed their admiration for his talent and for the genius of the deep-minded Beethoven. It was, however, evident that these compliments were insincere and that the whole company was bored and tired. Yes, the song of our peasant women was real art which conveyed to all of us a strong, happy feeling, while Beethoven's sonata was an artificial work of pseudo-art which contained no real emotion, no sincere feeling. And here is another example! — I remember having seen Rossi in the rôle of Hamlet. Our critics maintain that both this play and this actor are unsurpassed in their perfection. Meanwhile, watching the progress of the play, I literally suffered, as one can suffer only when pseudo-art is offered to spectators instead of real art. But quite recently I have read an account of the theatre as it exists among the Voguls, a wild tribe living in the North. The author of this account describes the following performance: two Voguls, one tall, and the other small, are dressed in deerskins and impersonate a doe and her fawn. A third Vogul represents a hunter on snowshoes and with a bow; a fourth by his voice imitates a bird which warns the doe of the danger. The drama consists in the fact that the

hunter is pursuing the doe with her fawn. The deer run away from the stage and come back again (the whole show is enacted in a sort of wigwam). The hunter gets nearer and nearer to the animals. The fawn is worn out by flight; it presses to its mother. The doe also stops to take a rest, but the hunter runs up and aims at her. At this moment the bird squeaks, warning the deer of the danger, and they run away. The pursuit continues, the hunter comes near again, catches up with them and discharges his arrow. The arrow strikes the fawn. The wounded animal cannot flee; moaning, it presses to its mother, and the mother licks its wound. The hunter draws another arrow and aims again. The spectators, so the eye-witness tells, become breathless; deep sobs and even weeping are heard in the audience. — As soon as I read this description I felt that this is real, genuine art.

EVREINOFF

The happy, sunny truths which you have just imparted to us might be justly called " the philosophic prolegomena to ' the theatre for oneself.' "

LEO TOLSTOY

If " the theatre for oneself," as you understand it, must cover the enormous and unexplored realm of simple feelings and emotions accessible to all men, you are certainly right when you advocate and extol it. Take, for example, the boundless realm of children's arts: jokes, maxims, adages, songs, dances, plays, imitative games, etc. All this

was hitherto regarded as something unworthy of art! Yet, even in its most primitive forms, this *is* art which deserves our earnest and sympathetic attention! The more serious is our attitude towards the play of a child, the more *fascinating* this play will be both to us and to him. This, by the way, reminds me of a very amusing case. . . . Oh, yes, you know it from my works, so I needn't tell it again. . . .

EVREINOFF

Dear Leo Nicolayevich, tell us that story! Please, do tell it! I'm sure that some of us do not remember it at all!

LEO TOLSTOY (*smiling*)

If you insist, I will. Even now, when I remember it, I feel deeply moved. This happened in my early childhood. We children sat on the ground and began to gesticulate energetically, as though we were fishermen sitting in a boat and rowing. But my brother Volodya stayed motionless in a pose which resembled in no way the pose of a fisherman. I told him so, but he retorted that we couldn't achieve anything by our gesticulations and that our "boat" would always remain in the same place, no matter whether he swung his arms or not. I couldn't help feeling that he was right. When, some time later, I imagined myself to be a hunter and, putting the gun (that is to say, the cane) on my shoulder, went to the forest, Volodya lay down, crossed his arms on his chest and told me that he was also a hunter going to the forest. Such statements and actions were extremely unpleasant to us children: they

cooled us off and killed our enthusiasm for play. What was especially unpleasant was that Volodya was, after all, perfectly right. I was myself aware of the fact that one could not shoot or kill a bird with a cane. But this was a game. And what kind of game would be possible if we all reasoned like Volodya? With such ideas it was just as impossible to hunt with a stick as to drive on chairs. Meanwhile he probably remembered how fond he was of this game: during long winter nights we covered a chair with shawls and transformed it into a carriage. One of us was the driver; the other, a lackey; girls sat in the centre, while three chairs served us as three horses. What wonderful trips we undertook in this carriage, and what remarkable adventures happened to us on the way, and how quickly and cheerfully the long winter nights passed! Yes, if everything was to be taken in earnest, there could be *no play, no play at all.* And if there could be *no play, what would remain to us in life?*

EVREINOFF (*repeating thoughtfully after a pause*)

" If there could be no play, what would remain to us in life? "! . . .

LEO TOLSTOY

Yes, that's how it was. Well, it seems to me that the artist of the future will understand that to compose a little fairy-tale, a song, a joke, or a maxim which can touch or amuse a child is infinitely more important than to compose novels, symphonies or dramas which, after having amused a few persons of the upper classes, will be forgotten by all.

Yes, they will be forgotten, for they belong to pseudo-art. You probably know that there exist certain recipes for the quick production of such works of pseudo-art, so that a talented man can turn them out *à froid*, without a trace of sincere feeling, working, as it were, in a laboratory. Thus, for instance, in order to write plays, such a man must learn, in addition to general principles of writing, also certain peculiarities of the dramatic form; he must make his characters sparkle with as many witty, brilliant words and phrases as possible, he must know something about the use of theatrical effects and he must construct the action in such a manner that there will be as much movement and hustling around as the subject can stand. Finally, he must learn to avoid long monologues or dialogues. Now, if a writer knows all these tricks he can turn out one play after another literally in no time. The scandalous and criminal records of the daily press will always supply him with a sufficient number of subjects. Why, then, shouldn't he work like a machine producing plays? — It goes without saying that the artist of the future will condemn this rotten adulterated art. He will condemn, too, the temptation of technical tricks and intricacies, for they often serve to shield the emptiness and the spiritual misery of a " work of art." *Art will become accessible to all men — any man will be able to create artistic works.* It will be so, because, purified of stupid technical flourishes which only spoil and disfigure it, art will become simple and easy. Professionals acquiring technical skill through mechanical training won't be needed any longer, for brevity, clarity and simplicity will be valued as the only real and important achievements

of a work of art. The art of the future, including the theatrical art, will be served by *all men*, by the *entire people*. Men will devote to it their time and their energy when they feel a real desire to do so. If such is your conception of "the theatre for oneself," it certainly deserves our warmest sympathy. I wish you luck, and I am sure you will have it, for it must be recognized that the art of the ruling classes, as it exists at the present time in our Christian world, is a *deplorable failure*. We have come to an *impasse*. We cannot follow the old path any longer! . . .

EVREINOFF

Yes, "the theatre for oneself" is the only way out of this *impasse!* (*After a pause*) You remain silent, Leo Nicolayevich? Well, silence is the sign of approval, is it not? (*Tolstoy smiles approvingly.*)

LEONID ANDREYEV (*nervously lighting a cigarette and turning to Evreinoff*)

When did the idea of "the theatre for oneself" occur to you first?

EVREINOFF

Quite some time ago. The first part of my book bearing this title appeared as early as 1912.

LEONID ANDREYEV

Oh, yes, I remember.

EVREINOFF

It was a great sorrow for me to learn that you have become an enemy of the theatre.

LEONID ANDREYEV

As a matter of principle I am not an enemy of the theatre. All is good that's really good. When a play is being enacted before my eyes and I am requested to believe in its reality, I always can compel myself to do so; it is the same sort of belief as that which prompts the child to mistake a chair for a horse. Moreover, I myself am not loath to "act"! And I remember cases when I did act! There was even a case when, while acting, I was carried away by enthusiasm! That happened in Moscow after a masquerade organized by the players of the Art Theatre. Like all masquerades, this was a dreadfully boresome affair. We felt, all of us, so blue that finally Ilya Alexandrovich Satz — did you ever meet him, by the way?

EVREINOFF

I should say I did. The late Ilya Alexandrovich was a very dear friend of mine. Numberless ties bound us to each other: to begin with, music, friends in common and enemies in common. We were so intimate that he spent his last night in St. Petersburg in my apartment. We had a long, unforgettable conversation. . . .

LEONID ANDREYEV

If so, I am astonished not to see him to-night among us. You have here such a distinguished gathering that Satz would . . .

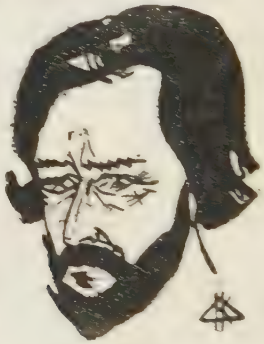
EVREINOFF (*interrupting*)

Satz would be, as usual, two or three hours late. This deplorable habit was so characteristic of him that, even now, after his death, it would be dangerous for him to attempt to get rid of it: that might result in a complete mutilation of his individuality. And what an unusual and charming individuality it was, you . . .

LEONID ANDREYEV

I know very well. That, by the way, is what I wanted to tell you about. Well, Satz, who was also present at this masquerade and who also turned yellow with boredom, suggested to me and to certain players of the Art Theatre that we should flee to some other place. "Let's go to my home," he whispered in a mysterious voice; "it isn't far from here. We will improvise some sort of party. I can't stand it here any longer." We followed him. On our arrival at his home we found ourselves in a dark, enormous room, very cold and very unfriendly. It was late, so that we could not even get any tea to cheer us up. Satz looked embarrassed and muttered some stupid and inaudible apologies. Finally he found somewhere a box of little Christmas wax candles. We lit them and stuck them all over the room — on window-sills, tables, chairs, on the

piano, etc. The room now looked strange, and all of us seemed to feel more cheerful. It was exactly at this moment that there began that unusual, charming and unprecedented amusement which I remember even now with a happy, joyous feeling: *we all began to act.* We were seven or eight in number — Mrs. Knipper, Mr. Moskvin, Kachalov, Zvantzev, Leonidov, Satz and I — and we all acted. There was no public: we acted *for ourselves.* We had no detailed program of acting; we set for ourselves



only the general idea of the performance: each one of us had to imagine himself in exotically and bombastically Spanish surroundings. Satz improvised the music, Zvantzev composed some verses, while the rest of us could say and do whatever we liked. The whole thing was incoherent and foolish, but very amusing and highly talented. As for myself, at first I did not feel like acting: I am not an actor at all, and I felt embarrassed. Yet gradually I was carried away by the general atmosphere of hilarious improvisation and also began to act and talk. This was so comical that I could not help laughing at myself.

Others laughed also — at themselves as well as at their partners. Sounds of music were interrupted by volleys of laughter, yet the acting continued: a meaningless remark dropped by one was picked up and developed into a whole scene by another, plots were piled upon plots, witty dialogues were born of a joke, we were all playwrights, actors and stage managers at the same time. And all this was for ourselves — there was fortunately no public.

EVREINOFF

That sounds familiar to me. I've heard all that from Satz himself, who told it with his inimitable humour. By the way, he imitated you, Leonid Nicolayevich! I don't know whether he did it really well, but I remember that one could have laughed one's head off!

LEONID ANDREYEV

Just think of it — even now, when I have condemned the public theatre, I cannot help remembering with joy that wonderful night of wonderful acting! (*After a pause*) Yes, people cannot live without acting! Dogs, children, university professors — all need it. Indeed, how could one forget these strange nights, passing, capricious moods, and flitting moments when one had an irresistible desire to act, to play, in company with others or even all alone, like a kitten. To make a wry face, to put on masquerading garments, to adorn oneself with an alluring Almaviva, to wear a pasteboard crown on one's head, to imagine God knows what, to shoot out verses, to sing —

what, in such moments, can be more intoxicating than that? Have you ever seen children who, for some reason or other, have been ejected by their comrades from a merry, animated game? Miserable and pitiful, they stand aside and shed bitter, envious tears. Do you know that, sitting in the orchestra of a public theatre and absorbing with envious eyes the happy acting on the stage, we look like these miserable, " ejected " children? Yes, we are but the public, the poor spectators who dare not join the actors! I feel like protesting, shouting, expressing my indignation! To play, and not to watch others play — that's what we want and need above all! And that's the reason why I condemn the contemporary public theatre: impertinent actors feeding on our money play and enjoy themselves as they wish, while we are kept confined to the gloomy and motionless orchestra! (*Puffs nervously at his cigarette.*) In the future theatre there will be no spectators. In this it will resemble the new organization of society in which the distinction between those satisfying their appetites at the gorgeously decorated table of life and those looking at them with greedy eyes will vanish — all will be invited to table! Spectators will disappear, because the theatre as a distinct institution, as a building with a ticket-office and with ushers at the entrance-door, will also disappear, dissolve itself in life, decrystallize in our daily activities and amusements. People will play themselves, and for themselves, needing neither actors nor spectators. Life demands that dramatic play, the prodigal son exasperated by fruitless wanderings, should return under the hospitable roof of the paternal home. Of course, I cannot predict

how it will happen. I do not know what will be the technique of this home-coming. Life is, however, so inventive and resourceful that it will succeed without difficulty in carrying out this joyous miracle. But I apologize; it seems to me that I have used too sonorous a word: will it be really such a great "miracle" if each one of us becomes, breaking the chains of passive sight-seeing, a writer, a composer, an artist, a creator?

EVREINOFF

If I am not mistaken, you have already written something to this effect.

LEONID ANDREYEV

Yes, I have.

EVREINOFF

I remember, too, that in that article of yours you have done me the honour of mentioning my "The Theatre as Such" as "a highly interesting book." Do I not owe this flattering mention to the fact that I advocated in it with all my enthusiasm "the felicitous process of acting," this "only joy of the mortals unable to comprehend the meaning of the play in which they act"?

LEONID ANDREYEV

Perhaps. Yet I will tell you frankly that I do not share most of the ideas contained in that book.

EVREINOFF

That didn't prevent you, however, from analysing and interpreting, in an article which appeared in 1914, the idea of "acting" in exactly the same way as I had analysed and interpreted it in "The Theatre as Such," which, let it be added, had appeared two years before that!?

LEONID ANDREYEV

Now, what do you mean by that?

EVREINOFF

Oh, nothing. I merely wanted to thank you for an authoritative corroboration of my ideas and conclusions.

LEONID ANDREYEV

Do you mean to say that . . . well, that you have won me over to your ideas? If so, you should remember that I developed in that article also certain opinions which are in flagrant contrast with yours. I maintained in it, for instance, that "just as there exists an increasing need of injecting dramatic play into our daily life, so there is an increasing demand for real psychological drama."

EVREINOFF

Well, that's an entirely different matter.

LEONID ANDREYEV

The old theatre of lies and falsehoods is dead. *Long live the theatre of truth!*

EVREINOFF (*shrugging his shoulders*)

What kind of truth do you mean? The truth of life? Of that fat, self-satisfied and hideous wench? No, excuse me, this is not a subject for conversation in a society where the elegant art of Lying, the kingdom of the Dream and the royal power of the Illusion have been extolled in such remarkable and enthusiastic speeches. Besides, you are off the subject, for I fail to perceive how this can have anything to do with "the theatre for oneself." (*Turning to Henri Bergson*) Professor! So far we haven't heard your authoritative opinion. To what should I ascribe your silence? I am puzzled and embarrassed by it!

NIETZSCHE (*ironically*)

Martial says: "*Est res magna tacere.*"

BERGSON (*to Nietzsche with exaggerated politeness*)

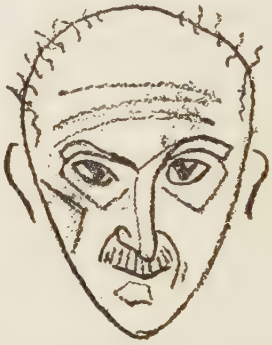
Unfortunately, you have not followed Martial's advice, which sets a bad example for me too. (*General laughter.*)

NIETZSCHE (*imperturbably*)

Plaudite, amici!

BERGSON (*looking around*)

I see that I am the last one to speak here. Perhaps I am expected for this reason to summarize that which has been said by the preceding orators. I hope, however, that my colleagues will forgive me if I do not do it: to attempt to formulate again that which has already been excellently formulated would be a senseless waste of time. I will therefore confine myself to merely restating three essential points in which all seem to have agreed. If I am



not mistaken, all of Mr. Evreinoff's distinguished guests are of the opinion that (1) "the theatre" is much wider than merely "the synthesis of all arts," that (2) naïve, childish plays are a source of deep wisdom upon which we grown-ups might draw not without profit, and that (3) there are weighty arguments which can be adduced in support of the phenomenon defined by Mr. Evreinoff as "the theatre for oneself." Sharing whole-heartedly these ideas, I shall now permit myself to add to them a few details of secondary importance. To begin with, I will draw your attention to the fact that the resemblance between the the-

atre and life may be interpreted in a deeper and wider sense than has been done by my distinguished predecessors. Let me tell you that *man's brain may be best described as an essentially pantomimical organ*, for its rôle consists in aping and mimicking life and the world. *Our intellect may be compared to the cinematograph.*

SCHOPENHAUER
NIETZSCHE
WILDE
HOFFMANN
} To what?

BERGSON

To the cinematograph.

SCHOPENHAUER
NIETZSCHE
WILDE
HOFFMANN
} Cinematograph? What is that?

EVREINOFF

It's the moving-picture camera. (*Gives a simple and comprehensible explanation of it.*)

BERGSON

The process of knowledge may be likened to the process of filming a play for the moving-picture show. Our mind analyses the reality in its constant change and evolution; yet, instead of fusing with this reality from within, instead

of dissolving in this spontaneous evolution, it observes them from without, it keeps aloof. Like a cinematographic camera, we take thousands, or millions, of snapshots of reality and string them on the abstract thread of action, movement or evolution. Then, pulling this thread and making these static snapshots flash past us one after another, we create for ourselves a dynamic picture of the things we have photographed. It is by this cinematographic device that our intellect imitates the reality. Whenever we want to revive in memory, to describe or even simply to observe facts and events, we set our mental cinematograph in action. That's what I meant, gentlemen, when I said that the process of knowledge may be likened to the process of filming a play.

NIETZSCHE

This is altogether too " scientific " for me.

BERGSON

Never mind. Scientificalness is admissible if it serves the cause of convincingness.

NIETZSCHE

And you believe that your explanation is convincing?

EVREINOFF

Please, Professor, continue! It is so absorbingly interesting!

BERGSON (*after a pause*)

Thus, life is a theatre. Indeed, there is a simple, yet convincing, experiment which will demonstrate it to you. — Try, by an effort of imagination, to spread your sympathy over all the men and things around you; suffer with those who suffer, act with those who act, spend your spiritual forces and energy with the world you live in, and you will feel how, as though by a miracle, even the lightest subjects have become ponderous and heavy, how a sad and meaningful light has projected itself on them. Now, dismiss this vision of yours; compel yourselves, instead, to look at the world as a light-minded and indifferent spectator, and you will see that even serious tragedies transform themselves into light comedies. Add to this that real life abounds in scenes which could be transplanted into "high comedy" without any modifications and which would be appreciated on the stage for their excellent theatrical qualities.

OSCAR WILDE

Bravo! One can always recognize a French scientist by his elegant wit, a thing which should never be expected from a German.

NIETZSCHE

Your pinprick has missed me — I am a Slav.

BERGSON

It is remarkable that the most dissimilar phenomena find their explanation in the theatre, or through the theatre. For instance, you have just spoken of wit. Have you ever thought of the fact that *wit* can be best defined as *the faculty of thinking in dramatic form* and of seeing things *sub specie theatri?* Instead of manipulating his ideas as monotonous and indifferent symbols, a witty person sees them, hears them and makes them act like players. He appears, together with them, on the stage and becomes one of the cast. A witty nation cannot help being in love with the theatre. A witty man is always, to a certain extent, a poet and a player. Now, in a narrow sense, wit may be defined as the talent of sketching *en passant* funny, comical scenes; a witty person does it so quickly, lightly and carefully that the whole thing is over before the listeners can fully realize and appreciate it.

OSCAR WILDE

Bravo, *cher maître!* That is the wittiest definition of wit I have ever heard!

EVREINOFF (*to Bergson*)

I thank you, dear Professor, for these highly interesting remarks bearing on point 1 of our *colloquium* as you summarized it at the beginning of your speech. May we hope that you will say a few words also on the remaining two points?

BERGSON

Your professionally theatrical fondness for system and order pleases the heart of the philosopher! Let me, then, pass to children's games and amusements. To the statements made by my highly authoritative colleagues I will add only that there is, so to speak, a great deal of *childishness* in most of our pleasant and joyful emotions. Who knows? Perhaps such emotions are nothing less than momentary revivals of childhood in a grown-up person? Perhaps they can be described as fragrant breaths of wind blowing from our vanishing past and reaching us less often with every year? I don't know. In any case it cannot be denied that there is a striking similarity between the joy derived by a child from play and the pleasure which a grown-up man finds in his amusements. It isn't for nothing that even severe fathers often participate in the foolish escapades of their sons. Everybody knows that such things do happen!

EVREINOFF (*after a pause*)

Now, Professor, I prepare myself to hear your illuminating remarks on the third — and principal — point.

BERGSON (*softly*)

Principal — for whom? for you?

EVREINOFF

Perhaps not for me alone. . . . Well, you understand that I mean "the theatre for oneself"!

BERGSON (*with courteous readiness*)

The views which I hold on "the theatre for oneself" are a logical consequence of my conception of the theatre in the general sense of the word. We shouldn't forget that there exists such a thing as the logic of imagination which has literally nothing to do with the logic of the mind. This mysterious and unruly logic forms a realm of its own. In order to fathom its laws, you must remove from your soul a thick layer of practical ideas, logical habits, superstitions, etc. This will enable you to peep into the very depths of your ego, where you will see a medley of images and impressions moving, shifting and sparkling like waves on the surface of a subterranean lake. Here is a comparison: The life of our planet is a continuous and strenuous effort to cover the mass of seething metals with a hard and cold crust. Yet volcanic eruptions still occur once in a while. If Earth were a live being, as mythology pictures her, she might dream, in the midst of her quiet slumberings, of these heroic eruptions during which she becomes strong and active again. It is exactly this kind of pleasure that we find in the drama. It awakens in our ego the feelings and passions which usually rest dormant under the crust of wise middle-class conventionalities and habits. The contemplation of a drama enables us to peep into the depths of our ego. It is not the actors whom we see on the stage, but the personification of our own unexplored and obscure longings and passions seeking self-assertion and self-expression. Our atavistic, centuries-old instincts are resurrected for a few minutes or hours, and

this gives us inexpressible delights. In other words, the drama unearths from the bottom of our soul realities which lay way below the superficial layer of useful habits piled up by culture and civilization. I have said that the imagination has a logic of its own. I might add that it has a philosophy of its own, too. On the basis of this philosophy it perceives in every line, in every curve of the human body a creative effort of the soul moulding and shaping matter according to its designs.

EVREINOFF

The body is, consequently, a sort of "theatre for oneself"?

BERGSON

Yes, perhaps. It should be, however, kept in mind that in order to contemplate our spiritual individuality in its fullness we must *free ourselves of practical life and of its routine*. There are men who have an inborn gift for thus emancipating themselves; I mean *great creative artists*. The rest of the people are seldom free. They are, for the most part, loyal subjects, if not slaves, of the world of phenomena. Thinking day and night of this world, they hardly ever give thought to their ego. They live, metaphorically speaking, far away from their ego and see but seldom the shadow cast by it over the road they are treading. . . . It is for this reason that, in my opinion, only real creative artists, poets, dramatists, etc., will be able to achieve remarkable results in "the theatre for oneself." I must add, however, that, as a matter of principle, "the

theatre for oneself " can yield just as rich a harvest as any other form of art. Art always pictures *the unique and the individual:* the painter fixes on the canvas that which he saw at such and such an hour in such and such a place, and which *no one* will see again; the poet sings to the dictates of his fleeting feelings and emotions, which never repeat themselves, etc., etc. Thus, the individual reigns in art. This leads me to believe that " the theatre for oneself " offers especial opportunities for . . .

But the professor could not finish the sentence: a distant, yet audible, crowing of the cock was heard.

As behoves real phantoms, my guests vibrated, fluctuated, faded out. . . .

I heard words of farewell, words of encouragement and a faint noise. . . .

They vanished.

* * * * * *

I had this dream when I lived in the country. I was awakened by the crowing of the cock, who announced merrily and energetically the beginning of the day.

O Morpheus! What sacrifices should I offer to thee for this wonderful, invaluable, unforgettable dream which disclosed to me with a miraculous clarity and precision the very roots of my ideas and teachings?

And this announcement made by the cock — what do I owe for it to the goddess Athena?

I shall never forget with what delight I stretched myself

out in my bed! For I felt with undeniable conviction that my dream was linked to the reality by some strange, symbolic and suggestive links.

The crowing of the cock!

I know what it means.

Chapter III

THREE PLAYS FROM THE REPERTOIRE OF THE THEATRE FOR ONESELF

I. A Buffoon at a Dinner Party

THINK of me what you will, but I will tell you frankly that whenever life places me in a situation where I can either display pity and compassion or laugh and ridicule, and where either of these modes of behaviour is justified by circumstances, I always choose the latter without a moment of hesitation or a shade of remorse. In this I remain true to the spirit of my healthy, merry and perhaps somewhat cruel ancestors. Let me confess without hypocritical reticence that I laugh at the sight of a tall and husky fellow who, trying to impress the world with his prowess, stumbles, falls down and breaks his nose. I laugh with an evil, malignant laughter when an old, fat and ugly lady displays her abominable legs, "flies" like a "butterfly," raises her eyebrows with the "naïveté" of a sixteen-year-old girl and earnestly believes that she can "vamp" anyone. I laugh beholding a dull-minded scribbler who mistakes himself for a great poet. I laugh watching a nouveau riche who doesn't know how to hold a fork; an aged lady who trembles with awe and delight in

the presence of a "real count"; a dirty speculator and swindler who, with the noblest indignation on his face, pillories corruption and immorality; a drunkard effusing sentimentally idiotic protestations of friendship for anyone and everyone. I laugh when I see a fool; a coward; a self-satisfied simpleton; an ambitious ignoramus; a hideous monster; a dirty hog; an ass; a buffoon!

By the way, I am crazy about buffoons!

When I want to amuse my guests with something really funny, I always invite a buffoon.

It is true that, in such cases, my buffoon does not wear the buffoon's uniform — the pointed cap, the wand with little bells, narrow shoes with senselessly long toes, etc. This, however, doesn't prevent my guests from realizing very well that he *is* a buffoon. For his behaviour is such that no sensible person can fail to identify him in spite of his absolutely un-buffoonish clothes. My guests are always sensible enough to treat this "gentleman" as though he were really a gentleman, and not a buffoon, and this makes the whole scene especially comical and amusing, for, flattered by their politeness, the fool assumes an idiotically dignified pose, talks with solemn stupidity and makes himself look more ridiculous than ever.

A buffoon! . . .

The reader, of course, understands that this is either "a husky fellow trying to impress the world with his prowess," or "a nouveau riche who doesn't know how to hold a fork," or else "a self-satisfied simpleton," "an ambitious ignoramus," "an ass," etc. Finally, it may be a

happy blend of all these elements. But such, ideal, buffoons are unfortunately comparatively rare.

You will certainly agree with me that nothing can be more refreshing and invigorating than a good dose of *digestional laughter!*

Don't you remember that the gods themselves laughed to tears looking at the ugly Hephaestus? Or that kings assembled under the walls of Troy and laughed their heads off listening to Thersites — the buffoon who dared to make fun of even the omnipotent Agamemnon? Oh, wonderful *Homeric laughter!*

"Now all the rest sat down and kept their place upon the benches; only Thersites still chattered on, the uncontrolled of speech, whose mind was full of words many and disorderly, wherewith to amuse the chiefs. . . . And he was ill-favoured beyond all men that came to Ilios. Bandy-legged was he, and lame in one foot, and his two shoulders, rounded, arched down upon his chest; and over them his head was warped, and a scanty stub sprouted on it" — it is with these words that Homer himself honoured the first buffoon in the history of mankind.

If, following the example of their gods, the tragical heroes of the Iliad could not do without the buffoon, the ascetically stern Christian Church of the Middle Ages went still farther: it received this gentleman in the most cordial manner and even sanctioned his participation in some of its rites and ceremonies.

It wasn't for nothing that numerous effigies of buffoons adorned the mediaeval churches of France, England (Cornwall), etc. History tells us that, however strange it

may sound, buffoonery had allied itself in a touchingly serious manner to religion. We know, for instance, that at Rouen the buffoon association of the " Coqueluchiers " was officially permitted to hold its gatherings in the church of Notre Dame. Moreover, Jean Gerson, the famous rector of the University of Paris (fifteenth century), was of the opinion that buffoonishly religious ceremonies " were just as gratifying to God as the celebration of Lady Day." Fools and buffoons were allowed by bishops and archbishops to officiate at " masses " accompanied by comical gestures and grimaces, by clownish dancing, etc. In Germany the " Holiday of Fools " was celebrated in cathedrals with great pomp and solemnity; the participation of the clergy and the importance which was attached to it by believers virtually transformed it into a semi-religious event.

Living in an age of unbearable seriousness, when men succeed in transforming even dinner parties into burial services, one naturally turns back to those happy days of innocent merriment with a sigh of envy. For a deep wisdom lay in that semi-sanctification of laughter.

The rôle of the buffoon was played not only by simple mortals. Among the " actors " who figured in it we find King David, the wise Aesop, Antioch IV, king of Syria (174–164 B.C.), Count Adolph of Cleve, who founded in 1381 the Order of Buffoons, Henri Bourbon, Prince Condé, Count d'Arcour, who was one of the greatest generals of Louis XII, Jean de Vendenaisse (Charles V's major-domo), the Duke de la Rivière (Bishop of Langres), the most outstanding ministers and courtiers of

Peter the Great, who formed, under his chairmanship, the "super-buffoonish Conclave," the great Suvoroff and other men of high birth and genius.

I hope you will now agree with me that the fool's-cap, voluntarily assumed by its wearer, is not necessarily an ignominious head-dress. Add to this numberless cases when, instead of following the absurd advice of their ministers, monarchs followed, to the undeniable advantage of their subjects, the wise advice of buffoons, and you will definitely come to the conclusion that it is more than unjust to consider buffoonery a sub-type of idiocy. Quite the contrary: Rabelais was probably right when he made his immortal Pantagruel assert that "fools often teach us real wisdom."

The reader, of course, understands from the foregoing narrative that there are buffoons and "buffoons," *voluntary* fools and *involuntary* fools, wise men playing the idiot and idiots playing the wise man.

I began by extolling the involuntary fools as invaluable entertainers at dinner parties or receptions seasoned by a reviving touch of "the theatre for oneself." I want, however, to make it clear that voluntary fools may amuse your guests still better: first of all, they will undoubtedly prove more resourceful in their insincerity than their "sincere" confrères; besides, they will follow in their acting a certain program, which, in theatrical undertakings, is always better than programlessness and blind chance.

As I am writing this a felicitous idea comes to my mind: if you are fond of the good old days and of fragrant

historical reminiscences, why shouldn't you stage a dinner party with a fool *wearing the traditional attire of a real fool,* greeting your guests with traditionally pertinent jokes, amusing them at table with traditional escapades, and playing, after the dessert, some traditional *al improvviso* (or almost *al improvviso*) scene which, for its risky salacity and daring, could under no circumstances be produced on a public stage?

Why do I suggest that it is exactly at a dinner party that a buffoon should make his début? Because eating and drinking "untie tongues," spread joyous ease and make people talk. It is here, if anywhere, that the theatre may be easily injected into life. Besides — well, I had better say it in the words of Erasmus of Rotterdam: "Where there is no foolishness, there is no merriment. Indeed, this is true to such an extent that if a company lacks a person who could amuse it by his feigned or genuine foolishness, the host either hires a professional laugher, or invites some ridiculous hanger-on. By his comical, that is to say, foolish effusions, this individual fights off the boresome silence and fans the sparkles of good humour into a general merriment. For what would be the use of stuffing the stomachs with roasts, delicacies and sweets if souls were not gratified at the same time by jokes, escapades and laughter?"

The rôle of the buffoon may be assumed by a "witty" and "humorous" friend of yours (it goes without saying that you will have to explain to him first what "the theatre for oneself" is). If, however, your friends are so prudishly dull-minded that no one of them can be expected

to make a half-way decent buffoon — *why shouldn't you play this rôle yourself?* Draw a list of weaknesses of your friends, prepare the first dozen jokes in advance (the second dozen will come by itself), rent a buffoon's costume at some theatrical tailor's and go ahead! The Muses will help you out!

II. The Joy of Recovery

POOR victims of the never ending rush and hurry of large cities, we often find a strange pleasure in falling ill, unless, of course, our illness threatens us with something really serious. Not to leave for a couple of days one's warm and comfortable bed, not to rush to one's office, not to be compressed in an overcrowded car, not to see hundreds of familiar faces, not to hear thousands of familiar, idiotic jokes, not to have any "social duties," in a word, not to be a slave of the all-pervading "vanity and vexation of spirit," — what can be sweeter and pleasanter than that?

A long disease, however, makes you realize that even rest may become tiresome. You begin to think with impatient envy of the overcrowded car, you would pay any amount of money to hear one of the familiar, idiotic jokes and you come to realize that "vanity and vexation of spirit" is a darn good thing, after all. . . .

Finally the recovery comes.

Pale and weak, you are still lying in bed. Yet you know that to-morrow or the day after to-morrow you will get up. And you foretaste the pleasure with which you are going

to select the tie to be worn on the first day of your recovery, you relish the idea of calling up a lady friend of yours, you delight at the thought that you will be able to see the first-night performance of a new play. . . . Oh, what a joy it is to recover, to return to the usual routine of life with its pleasures, labours and sufferings! You probably know from your own experience that recovery is usually accompanied by an inexpressibly charming tinge of — how should I call it? sentimentality? tenderness? which projects itself, God knows why, on everything around you. Speaking of this wonderful state of mind, or, rather, feelings, Talma, the great actor, says in his " Meditations on the Theatrical Art ": " When we emerge from the hold of a serious disease, a certain exaggerated sensitiveness still remains for some time in our nervous system. Little is needed to get us excited to tears or cheered to the happiest laughter. Our senses become, as it were, tenderer, finer and cleaner than they usually are." Yes, Talma was not only a great actor, but an excellent psychologist too. Our senses really become " tenderer, finer and cleaner " ; it is this that gives us, after a serious disease, a new feeling of life, a feeling of a new life, and an unforgettable happiness of a rejuvenated soul in a rejuvenated world. . . .

If the benevolent Fate has kept you for too long a time in perfect health and if, therefore, the tender joy of recovery has become for you a coveted, but an uncapturable, feeling, do not despair. The mistake of Fate can be easily straightened out by theatrical means: there is nothing easier than to stage the recovery.

For this purpose the following requirements must be fulfilled:

First, you must conclude an agreement with a friend who is a doctor, and with a nurse (the rôle of the latter may be played by a relative, or a friend of yours who is fond of posing as a compassionate, kind-hearted and unegotistic being).

Second, you must swallow on the eve of the performance a good dose of aspirin and of some sedative, so as to feel weak and slightly dizzy in the morning.

Third, the room must be perfumed with *eau de Cologne*, with some aromatic salts, with iodine, camphor and some other stuff of that kind. The radiator must be turned on, but, at the same time, a crack must be left in the window (fresh air, fresh air above all!).

Fourth, and last, two or three bottles of medicine, a box of pills, a tea-spoon, a glass of water, a glass of lemonade, a thermometer and a watch must be placed on the little table standing at your bedside.

The performance begins in the morning when you wake up. The nurse comes in. She greets you in the most courteous manner, asks a few questions about your health, pulls the window-curtains aside and helps you to wash your hands and face with the refreshing mixture of *eau de Cologne* and water. Then she takes your temperature, declares to you triumphantly that it is normal, shakes the thermometer with a gracefully coquettish movement and brings in your coffee with cream, toast and biscuits.

While, half seated in the bed, you are eating, she reads you the morning paper (you are still very nervous and

therefore she is trying to select news which can neither grieve nor excite you); coming across something funny, she reads it with exaggerated laughter, for this, in her opinion, is good for your health.

Then you talk of this and that, of the latest city news, of the enormous new elephant in the zoo, of the health of the Spanish king or of the divorce of a banker. The nurse is doing her best to show that she is a well-read and educated person. Soon, however, the conversation lags and you begin to feel bored. The nurse reads to you again (this time, instead of the newspaper, it is a novel which was begun yesterday, but of which you remember nothing: evidently you dozed off like an innocent child while she thought you were following each word of it; having made this discovery, you both laugh).

At this moment the bell rings. You look at the watch and realize that this is probably the doctor. While the chambermaid goes to open the door, the nurse hastily dusts off the table, fixes your pillow, gives a finishing touch to this and that.

"Good morning, doctor."

"Good morning. Well, my dear fellow, how do you feel to-day?"

"I feel fine. No fever, no headache, no stomach trouble. . . . Doctor, let me get up. I can stay in bed no longer!"

"Well, well! you certainly have a nerve, my dear man. Let me feel your pulse first. People do not jump out of bed like that after a long illness. You owe your recovery to science. Follow its precepts, then, to the end. . . ."

We all know that stereotyped jabbering of our good-natured society Aesculapiuses with solid tortoise-shell spectacles on their eyes, with irreproachably clean hands, with a slight smell of some disinfectant (carbolic? iodine? I can't tell) invariably attached to their person. They are a sort of international type known to all countries and peoples. It isn't for nothing that there is a "*notre cher docteur*" in almost every cheap French play.

He examines you with such a charming, exaggeratedly affected attention, his scalp is so clean in its scientifically reassuring baldness (you notice this while he is bending over your chest), and the tone in which he talks to you is so patronizingly good-humoured and engagingly reassuring that you cannot help falling in love with him. Is it not touching, indeed, that he should attach such enormous importance to your health, or, in other words, to your life, or, in yet other words, to your dear personality, to your invaluable self? Isn't that flattering? Don't you feel tickled to death? Oh, doctor, unforgettable, charming doctor!

Falling back into his chair and removing by an adroit movement the spectacles from his eyes, he declares to you with a tinge of solemnity in his voice that this time science has definitely triumphed over your ills: you have recovered. Yet you must stay in bed another day or two, for movement and fatigue may affect your heart. Of course, if you insist, you may be permitted to sit in a comfortable easy-chair for an hour or two. "Perhaps, strictly speaking, I shouldn't be so liberal — science does not allow

it; but I do it out of friendship for you; you're too tired of your bed, poor fellow."

He talks for a few more minutes, gossiping about some common friends, calumniating, *en passant,* Professor So and So (a dangerous rival of his) and mentioning an interesting case of cancer which he has at the present time under his professional care. Then he departs, filling the room with happy laughter, expressing in a noisy and abrupt manner his best wishes ("Behave yourself, young man," "You have a strong constitution, yet be careful!" etc.) and dropping a reassuring remark to the effect that "you needn't bother, I will send you a bill" (whereupon you say to yourself: "He certainly won't fail to do *that*").

Both your nurse and your chambermaid are delighted when you tell them that you feel a violent attack of excellent appetite; half an hour later a light chicken dinner is served in your room (you are, of course, still on a sick-diet). The nurse helps you to get over into the chair; if she is young and good-looking you profit by the occasion and say something to her flatteringly complimentary or even frivolously suggestive (a recovering patient may always do that; I assure you that it's perfectly all right).

Then you eat your dinner, drink your coffee and smoke your cigarette (for even this has been allowed to you) sitting in a chair, yes, gentlemen, sitting in a chair! Oh, joy! Oh, happiness of recovery! It is true that you are still weak; yet you feel that in a day or two the old strength will come back to you and you will go out, work and enjoy yourself as before. Isn't life a wonderful thing after all? The evening mail is brought in; you read the letter of an

old comrade with a great deal of amusement, throw the dentist's bill into the waste-basket with a great deal of indignation and feel that you are tired: an hour and a half in a chair is still too much for you.

The nurse helps you back to your bed, and you again profit by this occasion to make her blush a little (if only she hasn't lost the capacity of blushing at a complimentary or frivolous remark). Worn out by the day's impressions and troubles, you close your eyes and surrender without resistance to the caresses of Morpheus.

The performance is finished. The window-curtain which the nurse draws before leaving the room plays the rôle of the theatrical curtain marking by its soft fall the end of the last act.

Now tell me: isn't it charming when people nurse you and take care of you with a truly touching attention, when they talk of your health as if it were a treasure to them, when everybody's thoughts seem to centre around your dear self?

III. Trying on Deaths

I.

A BUFFOON and . . . Death!

Are there more antagonistic figures? Are there sharper and wider contrasts? Not that I know of, in any case.

A Buffoon and Death!

Man and Fate!

Human will and the will of Destiny!

The most impertinent challenge to Destiny is a Buffoon confronting Death.

A Buffoon who does not cease to be a Buffoon before the face of Death is a hero, nay, a super-hero. To conquer the fear of Death in the knight's armour and accoutrement is great. To conquer it in the Buffoon's cap is infinitely greater! For this is a triumphant victory of Man and a hopeless defeat of Death.

The knight's sword which has not wavered before the face of Death fills us with respect.

The Buffoon's cap which has not wavered before the face of Death fills us with the deepest admiration.

"To fight the old gossipy lady with a sword? Nonsense! We, fools, dismiss her with a laugh!"

To despise danger and to remain calm and serious is one thing. But to despise danger and, in addition to it, laugh in the merriest possible manner is an entirely different thing. For there is no deadlier weapon than laughter. Indeed, what would hurt you more — biting, caustic laughter or heavy, ponderous abuse?

"To look anything but ridiculous" — such is your secret wish. Such is Death's secret wish, too. And it is exactly in this vulnerable spot that the Buffoon strikes her! Now you will understand why his dingling bells and rattlers sound to her as a *marche funèbre* at her own funerals.

You used to say with a haughtily contemptuous grimace: "*Fi donc*, a jester! . . ." And, turning away with a half-smile, you ignored not only his presence, but his very existence. But the hour has struck. Death is at the threshold. . . . What is the matter with you? Where is your

magnificent self-confidence? your haughtiness? your "chic"? your "m'en-fiche"-ism? . . . The jester, however, still laughs! Just think of it, *laughs!* dares to laugh!

Rira bien qui rira le dernier. You thought he was a fool, but now you bow to his wisdom.

Think of this: We all live in an ever lying world where everything, including our five senses, is trying to fool us, where even the greatest scientific discoveries accumulate mysteries instead of explaining them, where one swims continuously in riddles and question-marks. How, then, can you expect me to take anything in earnest? What? You are telling me that "there is in our life at least one certainty — Death"? But how do you know that it *is* a certainty? What if there is no Death at all? What if we are fooled and mystified again?

Indeed, what if all this is but joking, fooling, duping and deceit? What if we are merely "animate material" in the hands of some bold experimenter? You say "physical laws," "laws of nature," etc. What, however, if all these laws do not exist outside of our imagination? Riddles and question-marks, fooling, mystification and deceit, illusions, shadows and phantoms, — how do you want me to swim in such waters and yet remain serious? Tragedies? Dramas? No, sir. I prefer joking and jesting. If the world jokes with me, why shouldn't I return the jokes?

The wise man always insures himself against the possibility of a mistake by a cautiously sceptical "if," or "unless." In this way one feels much safer, no doubt.

Yes, you thought he was a fool, but now you are ready to bow to his wisdom.

Let us talk frankly to the end.

Do you know anything *for certain?* ("Authentic knowledge"? Well, well . . .)

I will tell you for my part that I do not. No, I know nothing *for certain.* Absolutely nothing, sir.

Let us, then, joke, jest and fool!

Why and what for? you ask.

Well, let us say, *quia absurdum.* Yes, sir, *quia absurdum.*

What? Lofty ideals?

Ha-ha-ha! All right, sir. You said your ideal was a "super-man"? Mine shall be, then, a "super-buffoon."

2.

Ariman was often called by Egyptians "He who has many deaths" (the implication was: Be afraid of Ariman and worship Ormuzd!).

An old Russian proverb says: "You won't die twice, but you won't escape dying once, either!"

It's cynical? You are right. But it's very reassuring, too.

3.

Chapter XVIII of Venidades says: "Thou shalt call an atravan [a priest, a hermit], a man who wakes all night striving to attain sacred wisdom, who *stands fearless and joyous on the bridge of death* and to whom the holy, the magnificent paradise is open."

A super-buffoon achieves exactly the same thing as an atravan with only this difference: his method isn't half so exhausting and difficult as is the latter's.

No, my dear Maria Ivanovna, I do not want to be an atravan. . . . Pardon me, what? Yes, please, but I would rather have it this time with lemon.

4.

The two things which I liked best in the country estate of my friend M., where I spent last summer, were the new dill-pickles and Émile Zola's "How They Die." I swallowed both the latter and the former with a great appetite, and I still have a pleasant after-taste in my memory. Indeed, how could I forget the count who, "like a real egoist, wanted to die in complete solitude, without seeing at his bedside *the boresome comedy of grief and sorrow*. . . . "His last wish was that of a well-bred society man — to leave unnoticed, without disturbing anyone. . . ."

Can you beat this modesty, this refinement, this truly aristocratic elegance of manners?

5.

When risking their fortune, reputation or health, the Romans used to say: "*exitus patet*" (which means, there is always "a way out"!). From this formula there is but one step to trying on deaths. That the idea of such an occupation was familiar to the Romans is proved by their favourite method of suicide — falling on one's sword.

Nero had to pay a very heavy price for not having rehearsed it a sufficient number of times.

6.

As everybody knows, Sarah Bernhardt slept in a *coffin*, which was, in her opinion, the best imaginable bed for a woman of taste. The befitting motto "*Quand même*" adorned this hospitable piece of furniture.

You will say: "Extravagant pose, stupid perversity, good publicity! . . ."

All right.

The testament of the great Marie Bashkirtseff reads as follows: "I want to lie on my death-bed in a robe of very thin white wool. My body must be all draped by it, as I liked it to be while I was alive. . . . I ask Messrs. Bastien-Lepage, Robert Fleuri and Dina to dress my hair with the utmost care, so as to make me look very pretty. My arms and neck must be open as completely as possible; that is to say, the arms may be covered, but their outline must be clearly visible. Put some flowers in my hands. Cover the bed, before placing my body on it, with a large sheet of white brocade falling down on the sides and trailing on the floor. For God's sake, see that there are no flowers on the bed or on my body."

You will say: "Silly aestheticism, youthful whimsicality and depravity, idiotic and sacrilegious coquetry."

A-a-ll right.

Agatha, the old peasant woman drawn by the pedantically realistic W. Reymont in his "Peasants," accumulated and treasured all her life long her "death-dowry."

When her last day came, she took it out of the trunk, " relished each thing and boasted of her riches before the peasant women who dropped in to see her. As to the bonnet, she even tried it on and, looking at herself in a little mirror, said with pride and joy: ' I'll certainly look swell when I'm dead. I'll be almost like a lady! ' "

What are you going to say now, I should like to know?

7*a*.

Excuse me, Doctor, but you won't succeed in frightening me! There is no death; there is only illness and recovery. It is true, however, that recovery may be of two different kinds: one may recover either for *this* world or for the *next* world.

(To-day it is *you* who are going to pay me for the professional advice, and not vice versa.)

7*b*.

Why am I so fond of trying on deaths? Probably because I am crazy in general about things fantastical. (Don't you forget, Doctor, that death is a product of our fancy.)

8.

It is said that sleep is a diminutive copy of death.

Evil men are always afraid of death. It is but natural that they should be afraid of its copy too (it has been scientifically established that remorse will keep them sleepless).

The reader, of course, understands that a nap is nothing less than a trying on of death. That, by the way, is the reason why a good man takes the same pleasure in going to bed as a well-built woman takes in going to a modiste to try on a new dress.

9.

A good dinner is always crowned, after the dessert, by a bite of cheese, of poignant and strong-smelling cheese which sparkles with little drops of moisture (with "tears," as the Russians put it), and which slowly decomposes under the influence of infinitesimal worms (*Piophila casei* and *Tyroglyphus siro*). Such is the *will of men* with refined, aristocratic tastes.

Why, then, do we rebel against the *will of Fate* which crowns our earthly lives with an absolutely equivalent finishing touch, that is to say, with something poignant, strong-smelling, accompanied by tears, ending in decomposition and suggestive of worms (the *Perftingens's*)?

Cheese at the end of a *dinner!*

Death at the end of a *life!*

Indeed, the analogy is complete! Hence, one should try on (or select) a death as naturally and joyfully as one selects a cheese in a good delicatessen. Roquefort, Camembert, Limburger, Brie, — which do you prefer? It is true that there are many more kinds of death than brands of cheese. That, however, is all the difference there is.

10.

One can get accustomed even to mortal danger to the

extent of not noticing it any longer. You probably have heard of the painter who, hanging in a little platform at the level of the thirtieth floor of a skyscraper, looked down at the rushing automobiles and said with admiration: "Fearless fellows! I wouldn't ride with such speed for a thousand dollars!"

Death itself is not to be feared; but the fear of death is certainly to be feared. One of the purposes of trying on deaths is to paralyse this fear. Here, as elsewhere, practice and exercise mean a lot. Believe me, before passing to skyscrapers, the painter worked on modest two-story houses. Suspecting his enemies of a secret design to poison him, Miltiades swallowed every day the terrible arsenic in gradually increasing doses. Indeed, one should always keep oneself in trim and training.

II.

Poison concealed in the stone of a ring, a loaded revolver, a duelling rehearsal, a hunting party in the Caucasus during which the hunter meets a bear one to one, the testing of a just constructed aeroplane, the climbing of almost vertical rocks in Switzerland — aren't all these things thrilling and fascinating?

"To escape death by a hair's-breadth" — what can be more tempting and alluring than that? It is here that lies the secret of the irresistible attraction which the trying on of deaths holds for a mortal.

12.

The trying on of deaths may be of especially great use to misanthropes with a natural predisposition to suicide. For nothing can cure one of such a predisposition better than this delightful occupation.

If you are living in the South where there are many flowers, you have a wonderful chance of trying on death from rose-poison. Do not let this chance go! Pick out a day when you feel blue and when the world seems to you unfriendly and unattractive, and try it on! The sense of beauty will overweigh in your soul the dissatisfaction with life. You will wish to repeat the alluring trying on of this highly aesthetical form of death once more, and then once more again. This will lead you "unexpectedly" to the conclusion that a life which gives you the opportunity of enjoying such wonderful "deaths" is, after all, worth living. As soon as you have said these words to yourself you are saved, yes, hurrah! you are saved! No livid ideas of suicide will haunt you any longer.

If your physician raises no objections, "open your veins" for a little while. Do this in his presence, lying in a warm bath which has been perfumed in advance with a reasonable dose of aromatic salts. To have a complete illusion of "classical death," use, if possible, a marble bath-tub and request your physician to remove his eye-glasses and to wrap himself in a white sheet. It will be excellent if a friend unseen by you plays some simple and tender melody on a harp, or sings, or recites verses befitting the occasion. Believe me, after having "died" in this

noble and elegant manner, you will return to life with a regenerated soul: familiar things and men will appear to you in a new, bright, pure and attractive light. It isn't for nothing that our great-grandmothers were so fond of blood-letting: I assure you that this excellent tradition was based on theatrically psychological, rather than medical, foundations.

13.

History teaches us that deaths may be tried not only on oneself but also on others.

Thus, Cleopatra used to test various oriental poisons on her slaves. (This is, I believe, the gloomiest example of "the theatre for oneself" that we know of.) An entirely different example may be found in the recent history of Russia. General S., the Vice-Governor of a large province, was so fond of the dead that, learning of someone's passing away, he packed a little grip and moved immediately to the house where that had happened. He took care of the dead body, washed it, watched it, read the Psalter over it, accompanied it to the cemetery and was the last to depart from the grave. He possessed a considerable fortune which enabled him to devote literally *all his life* to such cares and occupations. The old man was about eighty. He was tired of this world and wouldn't have minded dying at all, but death was slow in coming. He felt undescribably happy when he caught a bad cold. An undertaker was summoned and the general gave him the following instructions: "Please make a first-class oak coffin for me. Polish it, adorn it with silver handles and put the very best glass

in the opening above my face. Spare neither material nor labour." Yet the bad cold passed and the general lived for another two and a half years. On the very eve of his death he examined his coffin and wrote to the undertaker: "Please send up your men to put my future dwelling in order. Its silver handles are dim and dark, it is all covered with dust, and it looks neglected."

One should never forget that disrespectfulness and light-mindedness in "trying deaths on others" can entail most serious and undesirable consequences. To prove this I will quote the example of S. A. Yakovlev, a young Russian millionaire of the Imperial Guards who lived in the forties of the nineteenth century. His guests never left his house before sunrise. When they got up to bid him farewell, he shouted in his coarse voice: "Bring in the coffin!" Whereupon the serfs rushed to their master and carried him in his chair to the entrance door; simultaneously with this a case of champagne and a silver coffin holding exactly one bottle of champagne were brought in. Then a footman gave Yakovlev a loaded pistol, and the ceremony of leave-taking began. Yakovlev lifted in the most menacing manner his pistol to the face of the first guest in the line, to whom a lackey gave at the same time the "coffin" filled with champagne. After having emptied it the guest kissed Yakovlev and went out. If, however, he could not stand such a dose of the drink and collapsed on the spot, the whimsical host burst into laughter and gave his serfs the stereotyped command: "Remove the dead body." The "dead body" was taken to a bedroom and slept there until complete recovery. Mean-

while, the " coffin " ceremony was repeated on every remaining guest until the drawing room was empty. At the end of 1848 Yakovlev was plunged into a deep melancholy by the suicide of a certain Ugryumov, whom he had accused by mistake of having forged his signature. Once he ordered his serfs to " bring in the coffin " at an unusual hour. Then he loaded his pistol, put its muzzle to his forehead, emptied the " coffin " and pulled the trigger. . . . The last words he uttered were: " Remove the dead body."

Well, it goes without saying that in the trying on of deaths, as elsewhere, excess of exercise is just as bad as lack of it. In any case, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum,* though . . .

EPILOGUE

THE performance is finished. The curtain falls.

Should the author add anything to his book in this short epilogue? Could anything be added to it? Is there need of any additions?

The author understands very well that he might begin the present epilogue with an aphorism like, for instance, this:

" Until recently men thought that God was only where His idols were located. But thousands of years passed and they came to realize that God is everywhere and in everything. — Until recently it was supposed that the theatre was only where its buildings were located. But thousands of years passed and the world learned *from me* that the theatre is everywhere and in everything."

This opening paragraph might be followed by a few " variations " on it which the author would naturally try to make as effective as possible. The whole would probably make a decent Epilogue — a little pretentious, it is true, but " dramatic " and " colourful." Yet the author will not yield to the temptation of such an easy, artificial and conventional ending. He will presently explain why it would serve, in his opinion, no useful purpose.

In order to set forth with due accuracy and precision the significant subject connoted by the title of this book, a wide and well-equipped stage was needed, for a little theatre de-

prived of modern accommodations would not be able to hold the enormous *ensemble* of ideas and feelings which, by their co-operation, succession, clash and sweep, have been intended to produce a certain theatrical effect. In other words, a real theatrical performance, with decorations, footlights, numerous actors, elements of tragedy and harlequinade, comedy and bouffonade, was required. And it is exactly such a performance that has been given to the reader in the arena of the present theatre-book.

Now, when the curtain has fallen, additional explanations could be of no use. Indeed, the play must speak for itself. Let the spectators judge it on its own merits, and let the author, at least for once, withdraw modestly behind the curtain without trying to impose upon them his ideas and opinions.